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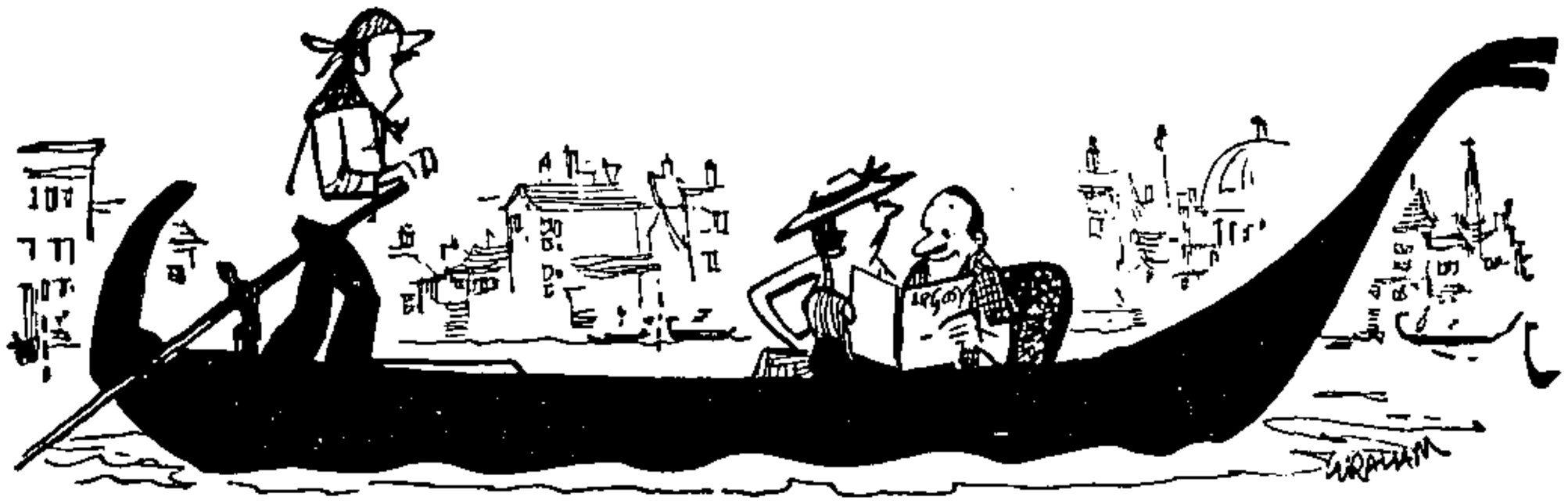

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Acknowledgments are due for permission to reprint copyright material by the following authors: to Edward Arnold for the poem, "Opportunity," by Harry Graham; to Ernest Benn for lines by don marquis; to Jonathan Cape for the extract by Julian Duguid and the poem from "The Complete Poems of Robert Frost"; to Jonathan Cape and the Executors of the E. Arnot Robertson Estate for her extract; to The Clarendon Press for lines by Robert Bridges; to William Collins for the extract by T. H. White; to J. M. Dent, Canada, for lines by Laurence Dakin; to Faber and Faber for the extract by Gerald Durrell; to Faber and Faber and Mrs. Helen Thomas for lines by Edward Thomas; to Funk and Wagnalls, New York, for lines by Leonie Adams from "Poems: A Selection"; to William Heinemann, Laurence Pollinger Ltd., and the Estate of the late Mrs. Frieda Lawrence for the extract by D. H. Lawrence; to Macmillan and Mrs. George Bambridge for the extract by Rudyard Kipling

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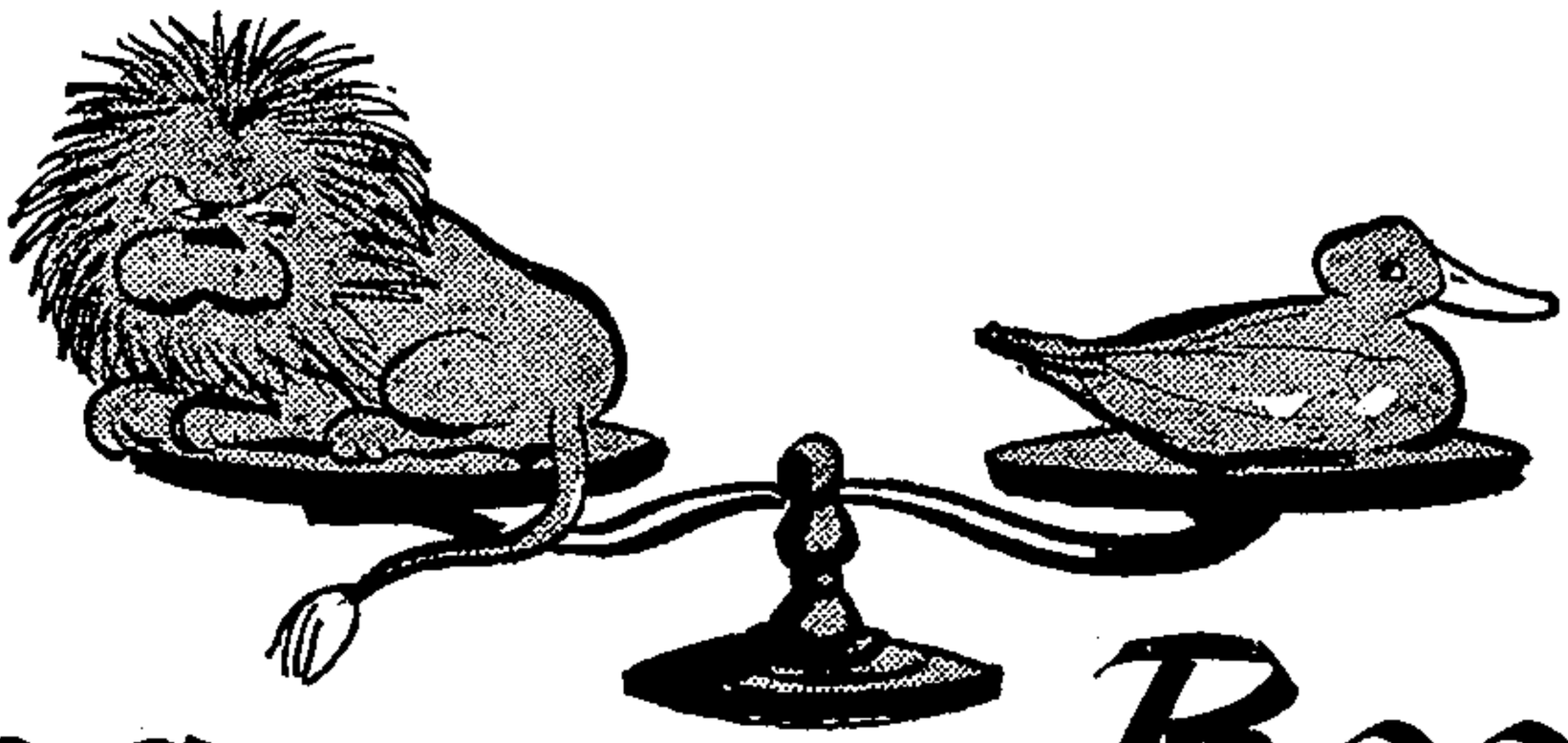
A Fleetway magazine



Log Book

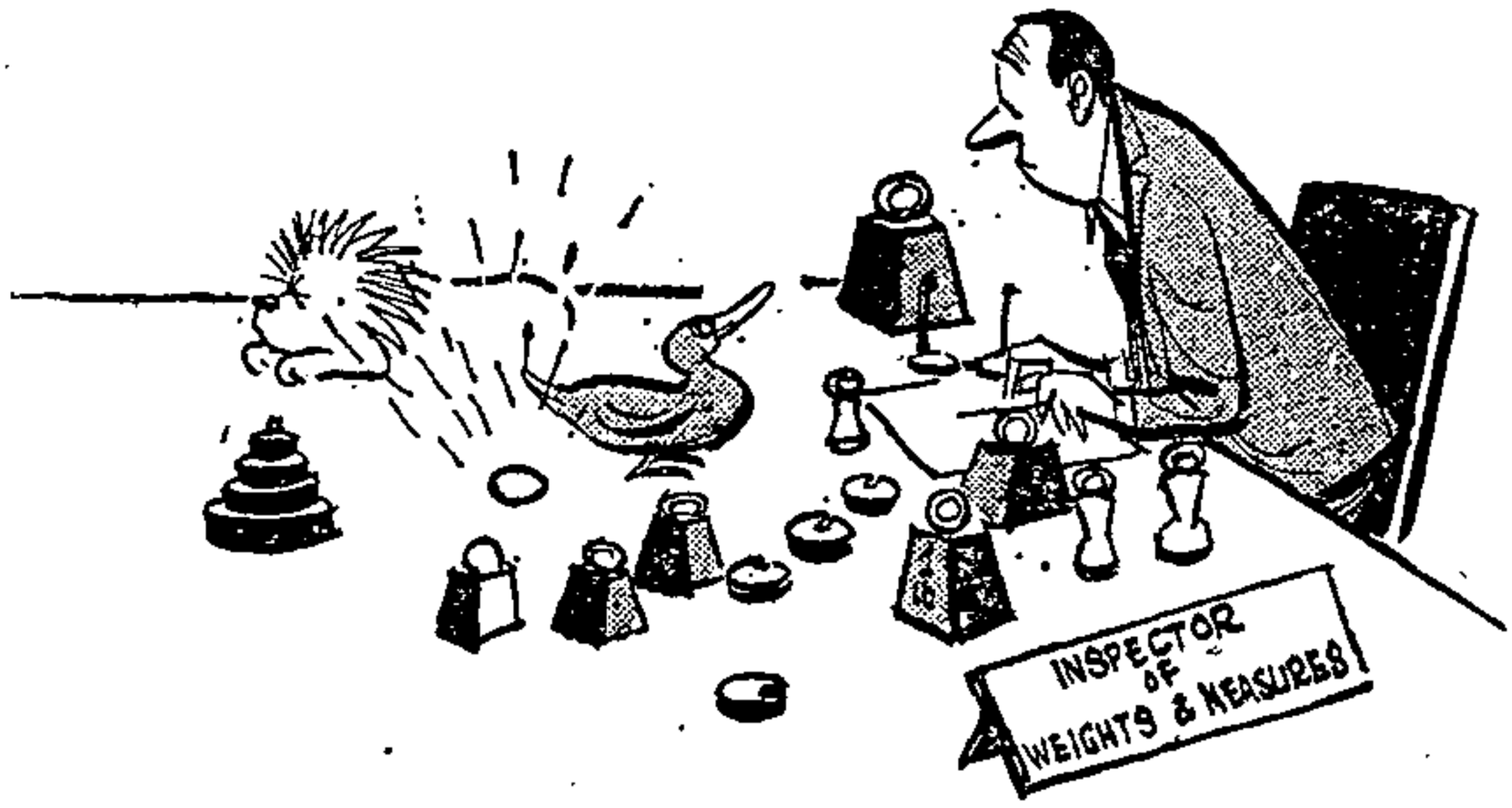
WE have always had a partiality for Weights and Measures. The only portion that remains from our schooling—much good it has ever done—is the table beginning, "22 yards one chain, 10 chains one furlong, 8 furlongs one mile."

During a recent rainy holiday we discovered an absorbing Weights section in a local museum and spent several hours there acquiring more inessential information. Did you know, for instance, that the Egyptians were using a neat series of limestone weights with rounded ends in 7000 B.C. at Naqada? And that in 5000 B.C. they had the beqa system which gave rise to our troy weight? We bet you didn't.

The Assyrians used bronze weights in the form of reclining lions, and the Babylonians had stone sleeping-duck weights, hence the expression, "Most sleeping ducks lie," derived from the regrettable Babylonian practice of making 28-mina ducks, short by 2 minas of the true shekel—what you might call a mina misdemeanour. The Greeks employed minas too—12 obols one stater, 50 staters one mina. The Romans, of course, created the pound, little thinking what trouble they were bequeathing to the British two thousand years on. But we also inherit a lot of complications from Offa, King of Mercia in the eighth century, who invented ounces and pennies, and coined the famous phrase, "Make me an Offa."

If the British go over to the decimal system we shall lose a lot of charming minor measures as well as avoirdupois. Wool weight, for instance: 2 cloves one stone, 2 stones one tod. Or ale measure: 9 gallons one firkin, 2 firkins one kilderkin, 3 kilderkins one hogshead. Other liquids carry their own measures; you have—if you can afford it—a butt of Sherry, a pipe of Port, a puncheon of Whisky, a piece of Geneva, an aum of Hock.

There are some pleasing dry measures too: a tierce of beef, a chest of cassia, a wey of cheese, a seed of clover, a seron of



cochineal, a quintal of codfish, a caroteel of currants, a boll of flour (hence the boll-weevil, which the Romans called vespertilio), a mease of herrings, a dicker of hides, a fother of lead, a shock of parchment, a cade of sprats, a fagot of steel, and a loth of quills. Ashes, it is interesting to learn, are a saleable commodity and can be bought by the cask; an American cask of ashes weighs 3½ hundredweight, a Russian cask 10 hundredweight; no wonder they have not yet got round to a Soviet-American Test Match.

There exist, too, some invaluable terms connected with weights and lading: barratry, for instance, a fraudulent act on the part of the master or crew in connection with a vessel's cargo. And demurrage, which is allowance made for the detention of a ship.

It should be more widely used, for example, for late trains.

Garble is the refuse of spices, dunnage the things at the bottom of the hold; groundage is paid for permission to anchor, ullage the part of a cask that has nothing in it; tret an allowance for dirt. How we've managed without these words for so long we cannot imagine; we propose to make full use of them now.

As: in this month's Argosy you will find no Tret or Garble; we warrant a supercargo, from dunnage to deckage, of ten prime stories in watertight condition, well worth your groundage, guaranteeing 5 hours (75 degrees) of first-class holiday reading. Always include Argosy in the ullage at the top of your luggage.

JOHN SILVER.

Horatio

Fishermen of Patzcuaro

By WILLIAM FIFIELD

THE Syrian waved away the woman with the flat, jelly-like slabs of candy. He watched her move on along the side of the comical little bus, holding up the wooden tray to each passenger in turn, and at the same time supplicating them with her eyes. A boy hurried out to the road swinging two buckets of clear water from a shoulder yoke. "Agua! Agua!" the boy called, lifting up the two buckets for the people at the bus windows to see. The farmer at the second window from the front stopped him and bought a cupful. He leaned out to pay, and the Syrian saw the long arms and the narrow, monk-bearded head outside, and the rest of him inside, only partly visible over the high backs of the seats. A woman came up with oranges in a basket balanced on her head.

"Cuanto vale?" the Syrian asked her.

The woman steadied the basket with her hands and looked up. The oranges were three for ten centavos.

" Three then," the Syrian said.

He had to turn back a little to reach into the basket for his oranges, and, as he was selecting them, he saw the girl. She was standing near the entrance door at the rear of the bus. That was why he had not noticed her until now. She was talking to someone, to a thick-bodied man who stood with one heavy hand grasping the pommel of his burro's saddle, and the Syrian saw her soft, dark face and her small figure. The smooth skin of her face, framed in the hood of her dark blue rebozo, seemed to have a sort of glow under it, and her eyes were black and large. Her heavy skirt spread out over the underskirts beneath it formlessly, but her blouse was of a lighter material and her arms and throat were bare, so that you could see she was small-boned and young-breasted. These things the Syrian noted in an instant, then went back to choosing his oranges.

Two of the oranges he put in the pocket of his jacket, which was on the vacant seat beside him. The skin of the third he cut into eight parts, running the blade of his clasp knife once round the middle and then four times down from end to end. He was careful to cut only the peel and not break the juicy pulp inside. Then, one at a time, he loosened the eight segments with his knife, took them between the knife blade and his thumb, pulled them off and let them fall to the floor between his feet. Then, dividing it into quarters, he ate the orange. When he had finished, he took out a soiled handkerchief from his back pocket. He rubbed his hands dry of juice; took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

It had been cold when they left Guadalajara in the morning, but now it was hot. Coming down through the maguey fields of the State of Jalisco and into the more rolling country of Michoacan, it had grown warmer and warmer, and the sweat had begun to form on his high, back-sloping forehead, drops of it standing out along the prominent frontal ridges over his eyes, and thin, dust-laden rivulets of it staining his face in the deep grooves between his nose and cheekbones. And now, in the early afternoon sun, it was hot. It was more noticeable when the bus was stopped. The Syrian left his hat off and opened his shirt-collar.

The girl he had seen outside the bus came up the narrow aisle. She was holding a large bundle before her, leaning backwards to balance the weight of it. At the next seat ahead, a tall basket of vegetables blocked the way so that it was impossible for the girl to pass with her burden. She put it down, stepped over it, and sat down on it.

" Do you wish this seat? " said the Syrian. He lifted his coat

from the vacant seat beside him and put it across his lap. The girl said nothing, only looked straight before her at the basket of vegetables in the aisle.

"It will be more pleasant for thee," the Syrian said. Still the girl did not look at him.

The bus started forward with a jerk, and the gears clashed as the driver changed into second. There was a second jerk when the clutch was released. The bundle under the girl shifted and almost unseated her, and the Syrian caught her arm. She looked at him, her large eyes frightened; then turned away. Still holding her arm, the Syrian drew her towards the seat, and because she was even more weary than she was afraid, she did not resist.

It was not only the physical weariness from the long trip down to the highway, four hours walking in the sun beside her father's burro—and from the sleepless, excited night before that. It was also the sickness from what her mother had told her in the morning, told her secretly and weeping, just before the father had found them.

"What are you saying to her?" the father had demanded, coming on them suddenly after having gone off to saddle the burro and lash the bundle of clothing behind the saddle.

The mother had left off abruptly from telling her what it all meant, from telling her what it would be to live on the hacienda of Angel Cetro, from telling her how it was with scullery girls who were virginal, and who also were young and pretty to look at and touch. She dropped her daughter's hand and stepped back from her as though the affection between them were sinful.

"What have you told her?" the father said again, coming close to her. The mother drew back into herself as she always did before him, seeming almost to contract bodily.

"I was asking the grace of Our Lady," she answered quickly, knowing it would satisfy him. He was religious, brutally so.

"Very well." He walked away from them and squatted on the earthen floor of the room. "When we have eaten we will go," he said.

They sat on straw mats on the floor eating the putty-coloured tortillas and saying nothing. Paco, the brother, was off in the hills somewhere, so there were only the three of them at breakfast. In the night, when the father had gone outside to relieve himself, Marta, the girl, had drawn her sleeping-mat close to her brother's and whispered to him excitedly about the wonderful fortune that had come to her. The father had come back from his weekly trip to sell skins and leatherwork in the village, and he had told her of his arrangement for her to leave the next day to

live on the great hacienda of Angel Cetro almost at the very edge of the fine city of Morelia. The city of Morelia was a wonderful place of cathedrals and splendid houses, and people riding about in motor cars. These things she had been told many times by friends. And the hacienda of Angel Cetro was the most splendid of the entire countryside.

Paco had grunted something and turned away from her.

" Will it not be something splendid, Paco! " she had exclaimed, snuggling close to him again and hugging him in her excitement.

" Leave me alone," he had said. " Go to sleep."

But nothing could repress her. She had only giggled at him and kissed him behind the ear. Then the father had come back and she had had to lie quiet, but she had lain there for hours staring into the darkness and imagining the great sights of Morelia and the magnificent estate where she was to live. In the morning, after they had got up, and Paco had gone sullenly off into the hills with his gun, she had begun to be frightened. She had never been beyond the village at the opening of the valley before, never even been so far as the highway, but today . . .

Then her mother had told her what it was to be; and the father had returned; and they had sat down to eat. The eating finished, the father stood up.

" We go now," he said without expression.

As they started away, the father astride the burro and the girl walking beside him, the mother stood just outside the door of the adobe hut. She stood there heavily and wearily, her legs apart and her splayed, calloused feet in the red dirt. She had scarcely dared say good-bye to her daughter. Now she stood watching, and she was very tired. From a distance, she was a lump of earth before the earthen house, but Marta, looking back from time to time, did not think that. She saw only the familiar shape and the familiar place becoming smaller and smaller, and she felt a sickness.

The sun rose higher and it became very hot in the narrow defile that led down between the hills to the village, and thence to the trail to the highway. The pine needles on the ground smelled resinous and scorched. The father, slumped in the saddle with his belly thrust forward and his hands folded on the pommel, whistled through his teeth. He was thinking of the money. Some of it he would use for himself, he decided, and some of it he would spend for candles at the church. There was, of course, no question of atonement for this thing he was doing. His wife had wept, that was true; but a woman's tears are to be expected, and to be repaid with contempt. Still, in a general way a man must repent, and, moreover, it was pleasant to kneel

in the quiet church in front of the beautiful altar and talk with Jesus.

Thinking of Jesus, and thinking of the money, the father decided against stopping in the village. He would stop on the way back to go to the church, and later to join friends and play dominoes in the cantina.

They went on through the village and down the trail to the highway. The man with whom he had contracted was waiting. Sending Marta away—she was tired from walking and sat down in the narrow band of shade at the side of a house—he talked with the man and received from him the money. In turn he pledged that he would put his daughter on the bus, that she might be taken off when the bus arrived at the property of Angel Cetro.

When this was finished, the father went over and sat down beside his daughter in the shade. For fear of what he might do to her mother later, she said nothing about what she knew. She wanted to pretend to be happy and excited to carry off the part, but this she was too weary and sick to do. She said nothing. The father said nothing. Merely sat complacently fingering the purse at his belt and occasionally picking something from between his teeth. After some time, the bus arrived.

The father went over to where his burro was munching at a dusty clump of grass. Slapping it, he drove it to a place near the rear of the bus and stood beside it ready to mount and ride back up the trail to the village.

"You will find a happy life at the hacienda," he said. "It is better than we have in the hills."

She said nothing, and so he added rather awkwardly, "You know that is true?"

She nodded, not looking up.

The venders were clearing away now: the waterseller and the two women, the one with the oranges and the one with the Yucca candy. It was clear the bus was about to depart.

"Go with God," the father said.

The girl picked up her bundle and, holding it before her, climbed into the bus. The father turned his burro's head uptrail and settled heavily into the saddle.

"Where do you go?" the Syrian asked her. The bus was moving along rapidly now, stirring up a breeze that felt good in the thick heat. It swayed from side to side as it went downhill, and the two red lanterns that hung in the upper corners over the windscreen swung back and forth.

The girl looked up quickly, but did not answer. Something

in her fright, in the way it clung to her smooth cheeks and made her eyes wider, stirred the Syrian. He had a trick of lowering his lids over his pallid blue eyes and at the same time seeming to thicken his lips that gave him a sensual expression. He did this now.

"You need not fear me," he said. "Where are you going? To Uruapan, or perhaps Morelia?"

"To Morelia."

"That is my home. I live there."

"I go to the estate of Senor Cetro."

"You are a relative of his?"

"I go there to do service."

The Syrian looked at her more closely. Her coarse hair was in two pigtail braids tied together at their ends. Thus her hair was parted down the middle of her head, the hair going to the two braids. She had let the rebozo slip back because of the heat.

In the lobes of her ears were two small circles of silver. They were like plain silver wedding bands, broken and separated, with a tiny wire connecting the broken ends. This wire pierced the lobe of the ear. All these things the Syrian noticed, and, noticing them, he noticed she was younger than he had thought at first.

"You are young for service," he said.

She said nothing.

"How many years do you have?" he asked.

"I have fourteen, but soon I shall have a birthday."

Taking his handkerchief from his back pocket, the Syrian wiped the sweat from his face: from along the sides of his bony nose, from behind his ears, from under the collar of his shirt. He ran the cloth back along the slope of his forehead and over his ridged, almost hairless skull. Then he coughed suddenly and drew in air through his nose, dilating the wide-flanged nostrils.

"Mucho calor," he said, only half aloud.

Unexpectedly, the girl smiled at that. He had looked so funny wiping the sweat from his face, and now the unnecessary way he added, "Very warm," made her smile. Partly, too, it was reaction. She was still only a little girl, and even in the circumstances it was hard to feel sick and like crying all the time.

"Very warm," the Syrian repeated, smiling back. The sensual look was gone now. This girl was a mere child. And besides, she was somehow very soft.

"You see, I am not so frightening, child. You do not fear me now, do you?"

Now that she dared look at him closely, she wondered at him. In all her fourteen years, the only men she had known were her

father and brother, and men of the village who were like them. And of course the round little muchachos with their shirts coming only to their middles and their plump brown bottoms naked. But this man could never have been round, not even as a baby. He was angular: the bones jutted out. And his eyes! His eyes were blue. Marta had never seen anyone with blue eyes before.

"Why do you stare at me?" the Syrian asked.

"The eyes," she said. "They are blue."

"Does that amuse thee?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered frankly. She giggled. "You have a funny nose!"

Now the Syrian laughed. The nose was like a scimitar. With a sudden comic gesture, he folded his hand over it as though to hide it, letting only the highest part of the hooked ridge remain in view.

They both laughed.

"Where I was born," the Syrian said, "many have noses like this one."

"That must be far away."

"It is. It is across the ocean and across a great sea."

"The ocean is near Morelia," the girl said.

"Not the ocean, child."

"Paco said so. Paco is my brother. He saw it."

"That is the Lake of Patzcuaro."

"It is not the ocean?" she asked. Her eyes were disappointed.

"No," the Syrian replied, "but it is much bigger than the ocean."

Suddenly, the little girl sat straight up in her seat. "Mira! Mira!" she sang out. "There it is!" She shook her head back and forth in her excitement, and the silver ear-rings jiggled.

The Syrian looked out of the window. The twin spires of a church could be seen over a clump of trees down the road.

"Is it Morelia?" the girl asked excitedly.

"No," the Syrian smiled, "not until two hours more. That is Zacapu."

The bus turned off the highway and circled the plaza of Zacapu. It came to a stop in front of a row of buildings across the square from the church. Several of the passengers got off. Marta had to lift her bundle and hold it in front of her to let them by, and all the while looking eagerly out so as not to miss anything. Other passengers crowded up the aisle and took the vacated seats. One woman was carrying a child in the sling of her rebozo. It began to cry, and, as soon as she was in her seat, she swung it round to her breast and it was quiet again.

"Dulces?" the Syrian asked, leaning out of his window. "Hay dulces?"

The venders had come hurrying out, followed by the dogs of the village. They stood beside the bus holding up their wares, and the gaunt yellow dogs rooted in the dust for what scraps might be thrown down. The Syrian leaned out, asking for sweets.

A woman heard him and trotted over; made the sale. The Syrian sat back in his seat.

"Is Morelia as big as this?" Marta asked him.

"It is more than a thousand times as big," the Syrian replied. "Much more than a thousand times."

The girl's eyes darkened in wonder. "But this is so big," she said.

"Well, Morelia is even more so."

Now it was all a great adventure. The bewhiskered garrotero herded in the last of the passengers and, shouting, "Vamanos! Vamanos!" and slapping the rear of the bus to tell the driver everything was closed and ready, took his place in the small niche made by the back door. He stood there in his dirty overalls, hanging on to one of the bars that ran down the length of the ceiling, and joked loudly with the men who were smoking. The hacienda, and Angel Cetro, and what the mother had said, and how the father had been—these things were forgotten. Marta bounced up and down in her seat; tried the leather headrest, tilting back her head all out of position to do it, gazed out at the painted houses that lined the street leading out of Zacapu; noticed the cut-out of the Virgin of Guadalupe thrust in the lining of the top over the bus driver's head; smiled up at her new friend, the Syrian.

"I have a gift for thee, child," the Syrian said.

"A gift!"

He brought out the chocolate. It was in a brown wrapper with tinfoil underneath and said *Made in Mexico* on the reverse side.

"It is a chocolate," he explained.

She looked up at him and then down at the sweet again, but she did not reach out to touch it.

"It is a gift for thee," the Syrian said gently.

She took the sweet and slowly unwrapped it. It was intensely hot in the bus and the bit of chocolate emerged soft and shapeless, most of it sticking to the foil.

"You must eat it," the Syrian said, when she merely sat holding it in her hand. "It will melt and be spoilt."

She began to eat it then, holding it flat on one hand. She laughed just for the joy of the sweet taste, and the Syrian, watching

her, laughed to see her laugh, and laughed to see her greedy mouth with the melted chocolate smeared round it.

Beyond Zacapu, the road began to circle down, working gradually into the basin of Patzcuaro. Most of the pines were stunted now, and they stood looking hunched and uncouth on the dry slopes. The bus crossed a bridge, over a small stream that sprang from out of a divided place between the hills. The stream turned abruptly and followed along beside the road. Along the banks of the stream the undergrowth was greener, and sometimes there would be a yellow splash of golden rod or a cluster of morning glory like white trumpets. The pine smelled good.

They crossed another bridge. The stream was larger now, the second branch joined with it.

Suddenly, the driver stamped down on the brake pedal. The rubber tyres whined as the bus careened to a stop; the two red lanterns over the windscreen danced dangerously. Everyone sat forward in his seat. Several said something out loud.

"What it it?" Marta gasped. She took the Syrian's hand.

The Syrian gripped her hand to reassure her, half rising meantime to see what it could be. Up ahead he thought he saw smoke. There was something wrong up ahead.

"It is the bridge!" someone exclaimed. "The bridge is burning!"

The driver came down the aisle from the front of the bus. "The bridge is on fire," he called to the garrotero.

"We cannot pass?" someone asked.

"No," the driver answered.

"What are we to do, Pepe?" the garrotero called, coming up the aisle to hold consultation with the driver.

"It is impossible to pass," the driver said.

"Clearly. Since the bridge is afire."

"Then we must leave this car here."

"Clearly."

"You," the driver said, "will walk ahead to the house of Miguel Vargas at the shore of the lake. You will telephone for a car to come from Patzcuaro."

"And you, Pepe?"

"I will see that we are all on the other side, with the baggage, when the car comes."

The bridge was a charred ruin; there was nothing to be done there. When the garrotero had gone, the bus driver had the men unload the bus. Then, everyone taking something, all of them started across the stream. It was not deep, and the cold water felt pleasant in the heat. Most of the women did not

even lift their skirts, preferring to have them damp and thus retain some of the coolness. The men did not trouble about their white cotton trousers. They walked through the stream bed, stepping on the rough rock of the bottom impassively with their leather feet. Only the bus driver and the Syrian winced at the rocks. They rolled up their trousers, each of them, and waded across barefooted, carrying their shoes so as not to spoil them.

"It will be an hour until the car arrives," the driver announced.

Some of the men gathered in a circle to tell stories and gamble. Others were already stretched on the ground, hats over their faces. The women sat at the edge of the stream with their feet in the water.

"Come," said the Syrian, "I will show thee Patzcuaro."

She took his hand and they walked off together.

"Is it truly bigger than the ocean?" she asked.

"Truly it is."

The hill sloped gently, and after a little while they could see blue through the trees. When the blue was plainly the water of the great lake, the girl could walk slowly no longer. She tugged at the Syrian's hand but he could not keep up with her, and so she ran ahead and was standing there at the edge of the cliff when he came up to her again.

"Does it please thee?" he asked.

She nodded slowly, still staring out over the lake.

The green-blue water lay in the bowl of the hills; brown and green-brown hills all round it. The long end thrust away almost out of sight, narrowing gracefully, and beneath the great end curved out vastly, rounding the two long sides together so that the lake was like an enormous teardrop. There were green islands in the lake.

"Come here," the Syrian said. He crouched down on the very edge of the cliff, pointing.

"What are they?" she asked.

"Houses."

The girl laughed aloud at that. They were so tiny. They were so small they were just white marks on the shore, and yet they were houses. Houses where people lived.

"It is true," she said, still laughing with delight. "It is bigger than the ocean."

"The fishermen live in those houses," the Syrian said. "In the day they sail on the lake in their boats, and at night they spread the long nets on the shore to dry."

"I would like to do that," the girl said.

The Syrian smiled at her. Then he sat back in the grass,

taking off his coat and making a pillow out of it. He closed his eyes and then opened them again. The girl was looking at him, but when he opened his eyes she looked away quickly, shyly. He unknotted his tie and opened the first few buttons of his shirt. The lake breeze felt good where he had been sweating under the shirt. Then he saw that she was staring at his throat, but now her eyes were not soft. She was staring.

"What is it, child?" He sat up.

She looked up into his eyes, in unbelief. Then again she was looking at the place at his throat. He lifted his hand. Felt at his throat. "Is it this?" he asked, holding the holy medal between his fingers.

Mutely, she nodded.

"What is it? It is only the medal of St. Francis."

She looked into his eyes again.

"What is it, child? Why are you troubled?"

"It is the same as the medal of my father," she said slowly.

"Your father?"

"Yes."

"It is only the medal of St. Francis."

"There are many?"

"Yes."

"I did not know."

"Why are you afraid of it, child?"

"It is the medal of Jesus."

"But that is no reason to fear it."

"Jesus tells my father we have sinned. He tells him we have sinned and that he must punish us. Then he beats us." The girl looked away, looking quickly away from the dangling holy medal. "Jesus hates us because we sin. After we have been punished we must kiss the medal and say we repent our sins."

The Syrian sat still, saying nothing.

"Jesus told our father to send me to the place of Senor Cetro, and I was happy and loved Jesus, even though he had made Father punish me many times. And then Mama told me how it would be!" She looked up, her face black with defiance.

"You will have need of Jesus," the Syrian said softly.

For a moment she still glared at him, withstanding his gentle look, hating him for wearing the medal of Jesus, hating him because he wore the medal her father wore. His compassion touched her—he had given her the chocolate—and she began to cry. He took her in his arms and laid her face against his.

"What you know of Jesus is not true," he said softly. "Jesus has much love for you, child."

She was not comforted. She began to tremble.

Pulling his coat from under him to cover her, the Syrian felt something heavy in the pocket. He reached in and touched the smooth, cool skins of the two oranges he had bought from the roadside vender. He had quite forgotten them.

"Do you wish an orange?" he asked her. She did not stop crying.

Sitting back so that he could support her with his shoulder but have his hands free, he brought out the clasp knife. Opening it, he picked up one of the oranges and began to slit the skin. Once round the middle went the blade, then four times down from end to end. Carefully the Syrian loosened the eight segments of peel. He seemed completely engrossed with his work, but he noticed that she had stopped crying. Making more of it than was necessary he removed the yellow bits of peel. Then, using the knife again for show, although it would have been easier to do it by hand, he began to divide the pulp into neat little pieces. These he laid side by side along his leg. When the last piece was down, he began to count them in a strange, clownish tone. "Uno, dos, tres, quatro—"

He glanced up at the girl. The black eyes were still shiny with tears, but there was a bit of sparkle back in them somewhere. Slowly the Syrian winked one of his blue eyes. Marta tried not to, but she smiled.

"His friends were like these fishermen," the Syrian was saying. "They loved Him, and He them."

The bus that had come for them was a peculiar one. It had evidently been intended for use as a street bus, and so the aisle down the centre was almost wider than the seat room at the sides. The girl sat in her narrow seat at the window, and the Syrian looked out across her. The bus was rounding the end of the lake.

"Those are houses we saw from the cliff," the Syrian said.

"They are nice houses," the girl said, "but I like better to see them from the cliff."

"You do?"

"They are so small from the cliff."

"He lived in such a house as one of those," the Syrian said.

She looked at him. "Did Jesus live in a house?"

The Syrian nodded.

"As we do?"

"Of course."

"I did not know that."

They passed the last of the houses, and there beyond were a number of men gathered on the beach, stretching fishing-nets

on the water grass, pegging them down with wooden stakes.

" He helped the men with their nets, and fished with them," the Syrian said.

" I would like to fish," she said.

The Syrian pointed towards an opening through the clump of trees that now stood between the highway and the water. " There. Look! There is one of the boats."

There it was. White belly of sail startling in the falling afternoon sunlight.

" It was a boat like that that Jesus sailed," the Syrian said. " It was on a sea very near where I was born."

" That is far away."

" Yes. But the people are the same."

The tall, fine-limbed Tarascan men looked up as the bus passed. Their faces were friendly. Among them were a father and son.

" Did Jesus have any children? " the girl asked.

" Many were His children. Many."

She looked at him, and the question was there in her eyes.

" And He loved them greatly, and they loved Him," the Syrian said. " He would take them with Him in the boat, and they would fish together. And He let them help Him with the nets in the evening."

" I did not know that," she said.

They had come to the end of the lake and turned inland. Now it was but a few kilometres to Morelia. The Syrian, thinking now that they would soon come to the estate of Angel Cetro, found no further words in his mouth.

The road curved up a shoulder of hill, and behind the lake fell away, dropped down and down, growing smaller. The houses were again mere strokes of colour at the edge of the water. The girl looked back at the houses. The bus reached the crest of the hill; swung to the left towards the pocket of smoke on the horizon; moved faster now that the road was straight. Ten minutes. Then, far ahead, there were the first buildings of the city under the fan of smoke.

" That is Morelia," the Syrian said quietly. The girl seemed not to hear him. " That is Morelia," he repeated.

" I was thinking of what you have told me," she said.

The bus slowed to a stop. Looking out, they saw the arched gateway and the columns of trees that lined the roadway leading up to the group of houses. They both knew what place it was.

A man in charro costume was sitting astride a white horse at the side of the highway. The stirrups were of silver, and there was much silver on the saddle and on the bridle. One with such

wealth could be no one less than the patron of the hacienda himself. His face was pudgy and of a putty complexion. His eyes were froggish behind his thick-lensed glasses. As the bus came to a stop, it backfired. The wonderful white horse reared suddenly. Senor Cetro reined him in. He had risen with the abrupt movement of the horse easily and almost carelessly, for all his pasty appearance. He had only seemed slightly annoyed. Now he watched the exit door of the bus.

"You must not be afraid," the Syrian said.

"I am not afraid," she answered.

She stood up, and he stepped out into the broad aisle to let her go by him. As she stooped to pick up her bundle, he reached inside his shirt and jerked at the medal of St. Francis, breaking the thin chain on which it was suspended. He was about to give it to her, but just then she straightened and looked into his eyes, and her eyes were large. "I thank thee for the sweet you bought me," she said earnestly. Then she started away from him down the aisle, and it was too late to give her the medal.

The bus started up again, and the driver ground the gears. He was not used to the new machine. The Syrian sat with his eyes closed and did not open them until he heard the street sounds of Morelia around him. The bus rounded the end of the zocalo and pulled up beside the long line of red coaches waiting to leave for Mexico City.

"Mexico?" one of the hustlers asked him, as he stepped out into the street. He shook his head.

"Tacos? Tacos? Quieres tacos?" The Syrian did not even notice the vender with his cart of hot tacos.

He found a taxi and, slumped back in the seat, watched the familiar buildings pass. He had lived in Morelia twenty years now. He had come over from Europe. Gone back again for a wife. Then settled in Morelia. Well, the wife would be waiting for him.

The taxi turned into his street. Opposite the flat bank of houses was a parkway. At the end of it was a blockish, ugly, equestrian statue. But along the parkway were rows of jacaranda trees in bloom. The petals had drifted to the ground, so that each tree stood in a pool of blue snow.

The cab stopped and the Syrian looked quickly away from the parkway and at the expressionless houses again. He was home. This house was his house, and inside it she would be waiting.

He gave the driver a peso and went up the steps and into the house. She was not in the front room. Then she would be in the bedroom.

Going to the bedroom, he noted mechanically the slovenly,

disordered appearance of things. It was usual; it no longer troubled him. She was in the bedroom sitting on the bed; she was wearing the blue wrapper with the big butterflies embroidered on it. He had known she would.

He went over to her and kissed her. The wrapper slipped open a little and he saw her breasts. Sensing that he saw them, she pressed her hand harder against him as she gave him back the kiss. The breasts moved slightly. They were like fat, veined gourds.

"It is good to be home," he said in a flat tone. He walked away from her and went to the window. Looking out, he saw again the blue petals of the jacaranda trees along the parkway.

"The jacarandas are blooming," he said.

Then she began to speak, and he knew he would have to turn round and face her, go to her. He had been away from her, and so he knew what he must do. He gazed at the jacarandas hopelessly. Now he would have to turn round. Now—or her voice would go high and querulous.

Turning, he thrust his hands down into his pockets. One hand encountered something small and cold. Metal. He fingered it quickly and then remembered. It was the little medallion of St. Francis. Holding it in his hand, he felt strengthened and made braver, and he looked up and smiled at his wife.

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Song

The peasant sun went crushing grapes,
Purple and gold along the road,
Where sylvan gods and antique shapes
Bear up the vine the clusters load.

Rock-hewn and grey the mountain towns
Throbbed into gold as he drew near;
Glowed with the fruit the vine-leaf crowns,
Over the doorways hanging clear.

His rustic face was lit with fire,
This lover of the Latin vine,
His Southern eyes burned with desire,
Before the wine-jars waiting wine.

Over old walls the clusters hung,
As he went crushing grapes content;
I felt the song he should have sung,
And thrilled with leafy merriment.

LAURENCE DAKIN, *Tancred*, I, ii

Alison Walpole is a pen name combining two dreams which, for the author, have not yet come true : the name of the daughter she has never had, and that of the Chelsea street in which she one day hopes to settle. Born in Sydney, she was a news reporter until a whim to globe-trot took her to England, France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. Satisfied, she decided to settle down, but met and married her diplomat husband instead—and has lived abroad ever since. Her knowledge of small boys is first hand. She has four of her own !

Letters from Form IV

By ALISON WALPOLE

Geoffrey Smallbone's letter

Dear Mummy and Daddy, Sunday

Please do not post the penknife and chain you promised me as a boy called Kirkpatrick has ruaned a desk and Mr. Figures is confiskating them all until he ones up. You can bring it when you come at half term exeat and then no one will know about it. Bring sandwich spread instead of honey this time.

Another boy called Taylor cut his thumb on a fretsaw on Thursday he's all right now but there was a lot of blood and he's got three stitches.

On Friday we had a complete blackout. It started in chapel when a boy was reading the lesson. He suddenly stopped dead. From that time on we all used candles for the next three hours. As a result of this we missed latin prep thank goodness. There were realy not enough candles to be got round the hole school so we all had to go about in pitch darkness most of the time. It was Form IV's bath night and we had to have our baths in the dark which was great fun as we could flick water behind the assistant matron's back without her knowing. She kept on

saying " Oh dear what a dreadful evening." This is the new assistant matron I told you about at the beginning of term she is much prittier than the one we had.

In the dormitry we had a contest at who could flick out the candle when she wasn't looking. Then Mr. Hall who was on duty in the senior dormitry came in and tried to be cross with us but at first he couldn't see who to be cross with. Miss Sellars was still ringing her hands and moning about the tragedy but we were all skuffling in the dark and she couldn't find the candle.

Unfortunatly Mr. Hall got hold of a torch pritty soon and he shone it on Macmillan ii who was just rigging up a string barikade to trip her when she went out the door. We all got order marks and are docked stodge for a fortnight* but it was well worth it and more fun than any night this hole term.

On wensday there was a match against Haddington Away and on saturday against Haddington Home. We bete them both times. As they are our hardest oponents, we shall probably not have many difulcuties for the rest of the spring term. I have only scored two tries this week. The bell has just gone. Love from Geoffrey

Chipfield School,
Near Olresford, Hants.

* Macmillan is docked stodge for the hole term.

Michael Winch's letter

Dear Mum and Dad,

I hope you are well, I am.

Yesterday there was a match against Haddington (H). The score was 0 for them and 16 for us. Last Wednesday there was a match against Haddington (A) the score was 3 for them and 6 for us.

Last Friday the lights went out in Chapal when Crick i was reading the lesson. Mr. Figures said he would light the altar candles so we could see to go out of Chapal. He said it was only a fuse and Mr. Hall could fix it in a moment. But it didn't get fixed for ages. When we got out of Chapal we had to wait in the gym till Miss Sellars called the 1st batch up to bed. She only had one candle because the rest were needed for the other forms.

Miss Sellars is insted of Miss Brice who left. This school always has trouble keeping asistant matrons. I heard Mr. Figures telling Mrs. Figures they were lucky to find anyone who could stand us. But Miss Sellars won't leave yet I think because she's sweet on Mr. Hall only he doesn't know about it

yet. It's because of Mr. Hall we are much better at rugger this year. He teaches history too and he's trying to write books in his spare time which is why he never notices asistant matrons changing. I bet he still thinks Miss Sellars is Miss Brice. The school sekretary is keen on him too but not as bad as Miss Sellars.

Taylor cut himself during carpentry lesson this week and Miss Sellars had to go with him to the hospital while he had his thumb stitched. He had a prick to stop it hurting but he said she nearly fainted while the doctor was sewing it up for him. Taylor managed to cheer her up by telling her how much Form IV liked Mr. Hall. He said she was very grateful and they talked about him all the way home. But when they got to the Lodge gates and Taylor saw Mr. Hall out walking in the woods, she didn't want to stop the taxi and offer him a lift.

So Taylor waved his bandage out the window and Mr. Hall stopped the taxi himself to ask how many stitches he had. Then Miss Sellers pretended to be very jolly about it just like an ordinary matron.

I'm sorry I haven't time to tell you about the fun we had on Friday night. It was a grate lark. I came 6th in the half term exams but I'll do better I hope at the end.

Love Michael

P.S. Could you send me a tin of toffee marked books only, we have had stodge stopped for a fortnight? Also please bring me a penknife at half term. Mine got mislade.

David Piper's letter

Dear Mother and Father,

I was first in the half term examinations and will be going up to Form V after Easter. The rest of the boys in Form IV seem to be more interested in Rugger results than in form marks so I have had no trouble coming at the head of the pluses chart this term.

Last Friday the lights fused during the evening chapel service and we unfortunately missed the Latin prep. I rather suspect that Macmillan ii had something to do with the fuse. Macmillan is the boy who trod on Mother's toe at the last sports. He is always in hot water about something. So is Taylor. They usually tie for bottom but they seem proud of it. Taylor can't write home this week because of the stitches on his right hand (from carpentry class). He is fooling about trying to distract everyone else.

Form IV is still making a hero out of Mr. Hall, the gym instructor and football coach. He is the most popular

master this term but Mr. Carter kept better discipline when he was the junior resident. Mr. Carter is still the science master but he got married.

Some boy carved a name on one of the desks last week and has had all our penknives confiscated for us. It wasn't his own name of course. It was Mr. Hall's.

Here is what I wrote in last week's diary.

6th Monday. Haircut and afternoon run for whole school.
7th Tuesday. In science we learnt about the convection of heat.
8th Wednesday. Match against Haddington. Finished hand-work task.
9th Thursday. Lecture with lantern slides on African tribes.
10th Friday. Lights fused in chapel.
11th Saturday. Return match against Haddington.

Your loving son, David

Nigel Kirkpatrick's letter

Dear Mops and Pops,

We have beeten Haddington. Hooray. We did it twice last week which is the first time in years. But it's only to be expected with Mr. Hall in charge. Everyone except Piper is delited. I don't think he even bothered to find out the score. He is still plugging at coming top and never notuses anything.

On Tuesday I boxed Piper and won but that's not hard. Next week I am to box Macmillan ii and if I can beet him Mr. Hall will be more pleesed with me.

Macmillan and his gang fused the lites again on Friday. They haven't been able to do it for ages and nobody is supposed to know they did it this time but I saw Johnson skip into the gym when he should of been in chapel. Johnson's in Macmillan's gang. I wish Macmillan would ask me.

I can not think of much more to say so I will fill the rest of the letter with not very interesting stuff as they do not allow you to send your letter unless it is a reasnable length. When we're finished we take them up to Mr. Hall and he glances to make sure we've got on to the back page and then gives out the envelope.

Two of the boys in our form are in the sick wing with measles. We all got our penknives confiskated. Most of the boys know it was my fault but they said not to mind about owning up because it was Mr. Hall's name I carved on the desk and now it will be there for ever.

Even Miss Sellars is gone on Mr. Hall. The Form IV

chaps are all rather sorry for her because he's above such things really. We lay bets about her chances of talking to him. She usually manages it after breakfust by pretending she was too busy correcting our manners to get time to drink her own tea. So when the bell goes and we get up to go out, she has an exkuse to move over to Mr. Hall's table and finish it off there. It's harder for her during the day as he's tied up with lessons and football.

We all do our best to help by leaving sweaters and house shoes in the wrong places so she can ask him if he's seen them. And when they're both on dormitry duty at nite, we try to create divershuns so they'll have to get together to put down the racket. I should think that's why Macmillan picked Friday to fuse the lites. It may have done her a good turn too because I'm sure Mr. Hall was holding her hand when I went outside the dormitry later. Only it was dark and she was in a state because we'd been pulling her leg so you couldn't be very definut.

But it was broad daylight during the Haddington match yesterday afternoon so I had a good squint at them in the tea-break. He was really talking to her and looking at her and she is very pretty, only a bit soft and willing to believe anything you tell her. All the boys say she's more like their mothers than the other matrons ever were (Only younger).

The bell has rung now. Please bring more apples and extra chocolate when you come at half-term.

lots of love, Nigel

Christopher Harris' letter

Dear Aged Parents,

The food at Chipfield hasn't improved this term and now Form IV has had stodge stopped. So would you kindly send food parcels to your starving offspring?

I was second in exams again but I'll never beat Piper so I'm not going to try.

Mr. Hall, the coach, has at last taken note of the pretty matron you asked me to watch after you met them in the drive the day term opened. I should think you are the only Aged Ps who ever inquire about such matters.

She had a splendid opportunity on Friday night when he strode like Galahad into Form IV dormitory to put an end to our ragging. I suppose you can't help seeing a damsel in distress when you save her. After he restored order, I could hear them talking on the stairs, so I pretended I needed to go to the bathroom and slipped outside.

She was still thanking him and saying how hard she'd found it to cope with us with the lights all fused. I heard Mr. Hall saying. "You really shouldn't let them upset you. I know they're exasperating but small boys can't help reacting to discomfort more joyfully than we do, Susan."

I must say I was rather struck with this view because the only other fun we've had this term was when the washing-up machine went haywire and broke all the plates, which Mrs. Figures said was a calamity.

However, the only bit she listened to was her own name at the end. She said. "That's the first time you've ever used my name, David."

He said. "Good heavens, is it? That makes me sound so—unfriendly. I'm sorry."

They didn't get any further because Kirkpatrick must have got the same idea as me and he came out of the dormitory too. Only he made more noise about it and Mr. Hall called out. "Get back to bed instantly."

Kirkpatrick said, "But I wanted to go to the bathroom, sir." And Mr. Hall said. "You did not, Kirkpatrick."

They still hadn't noticed me and when the dormitory door closed, I heard her saying. "But perhaps he really *did* want to go." And Mr. Hall laughed like anything and said, "Oh, Susan, that's your whole trouble. You're always swallowing what those little brutes tell you. Try to be tough with them."

And then there was quite a long pause. Round the bend of the stairs where they were, there was some moonlight from the window but I couldn't see a thing.

Then I heard him saying. "Though I'm sure you'd find that very difficult." And I'm almost certain he must have kissed her because—she gave a choky sort of noise and said "Oh, David."

I can't swear to this because I was wedged behind the outgrown clothes cupboard and couldn't even stretch my neck to catch their whispers without making a creak.

I hope you're pleased with this account because it sounds drippy to me. Perhaps he likes her because she's not tough enough.

Taylor and Macmillan are organising something between them. They won't spill, but they've got some plan for helping Miss Sellars land Mr. Hall.

I hope your cocktail party was a success on Tuesday.

Your d-e-v-o-t-e-d and affection-a-t-e son and heir,

Christopher

Peter Macmillan's letter

Dear Mummey and Daddey,

We are not all that bad at rugger this year tell daddey. On wensday we even bete Haddington on there own ground 6-3 and on saturday we bete them here 16-0 it is bekos Mr. Hall is a jolly good coach. Onley he's mad with me bekos he shon his torch in the dark and saw me trying to trip Miss Sellars. It was a grate pity bekos I was only doing it to make him notus her; and two boys called Smallbone and Kirkpatrick had hiden the candel and told me I had time to fix my speshul crash barier. This was the one I used on Miss Carter the term before last when we fused the lites. It's getting more difikult to do lately bekos Mr. Hall knows more about the fuse-box than the other masters did. Taylor has his hand bandaged this week so Johnson from the 6th form had to do it this time during chapul servus.

Miss Sellars is pritty pleased with me though. Mr. Hall has never paid much attenshun to her before but he reskued her from our dormitry on friday nite and on saturday during the Haddington match tea brake he invited her out to dinner. I know bekos when she was putting us to bed on saturday she told me and sed would I be good for once as it was important for her to get off on time. Then she told me she was sorry we had our stodge stopped and gave me a paket of fruit drops bekos I had mine stopped longer than anyone else. She's alrite reely but a bit soppy sometimes espeshuly over Mr. Hall. This morning she is looking very pritty indede and gave me two bars of choklat and a bag of jelly babies so her diner must of been good. Mr. Hall is rather odd today too. When I was late for brekfust bell he just sed " Oh get a move on Macmillan, there's a good chap," and didn't hand out any order marks at all. And now he's doodling her name all over his blotting paper wile he wates for us to finish our sunday leters. I just went up to get an envelope and he had long rows of Susans all jigled up together. Before Uncle James maried Aunt Celia he couldn't stop riting her name on things like bus tikets and talking about her. One sunday before he got engaged he sed her name 84 times. Jane and me counted bekos I'd promised her a turn with my yo-yo if he got to a 100.

I'm sorry I came last but Taylor onley bete me by two marks. I'm sorry about the blots too.

Your loving son, Peter

P.S. I wasn't going to add this bekos you might think me soppy but Taylor and me are planning to fix things for Miss Sellars and Mr. Hall by aranging another divershun for wensday. One more crisis should reely do it.

Colin Taylor's letter

Chipfield School,
Near Olresford,
Hants.
Thursday, 16th March

Dear Mum and Dad,

Today we should of begun hockey but it's canseld and we're all given extra prep insted. Mrs. Figures told me to use mine riting the leter home I mist last sunday bekos of my thum. She says she rote a note explaning but youd expekt one now the stitches are out.

The hockey got canseld like this. All Form IV think Miss Sellars is a desent sort and we were sure Mr. Hall thort so too but needed a bit of pushing to come rite up to scratch.

Macmillan's idea was to make a crisis on wensday nite when Mr. Hall and Miss Sellars were both on dormitries. Of corse a crisis has to start from what looks like natural causes and we've overdone fusing the lites lately. But Macmillan sed what was more natural than the hole school having food poisoning bekos its worse than ever this term.

His plan was that we'd work it up slowly with a few boys having hedakes before chapel and some groning and being exkused in chapel—but the main detatshment was to go into akshun at bedtime. This would mean Mr. Hall would be sending boys along to Miss Sellars for taking temperatures and theyd have to consult and compare simptoms in all the dormitries so one way or another theyd be together all evening and we'd keep them at it with more cases cropping up every now and then.

Macmillan sed we'd better get rid of the rest of the staff. But that's pritty easy. You just send a boy in while they're having coffee in the staffroom after chapel servus to say that the farm cows have got on the playing grounds. This always works bekos Mr. Figures makes them all rush out to drive the cows off. In the dark it can take anything up to an hour to shift the cows.

Winch got the job of letting the cows in and Kirkpatrick was to warn the staffroom. Macmillan picked him bekos he has such an inosent face and also bekos he went down with measles before lunch and you can see the playing grounds better from the sickroom windows. Besides as he's in quarantine the staff would know he hadn't let the cows in himself. It's often dificult to get chaps to do this job bekos it puts them under suspishun strate away.

Smallbone was to go sick in chapel and Harris was to wrythe on the floor as soon as we got to the dormitry. Everything went off jolly well in the begining. We had Miss Sellars

dashing about and even Mr. Hall fell for it and he's much more difficult to fool. He sed he'd call the doctor for advice. We knew the rest of the staff must be out chasing cows by then so we speeded things up and there were cashulties in every dormitry by the time he got back. And then, just as Macmillan did a super sprawl on the floor in a ded faint, we herd Mr. Figures say "What *is* this all about?" and there he was with Matron and Mrs. Figures. Macmillan was so surprised he sat up, and that gave the whole show away.

We couldn't make out how they got back from the playing grounds but this morning we diskovered they never even went there.

Unfortunatly Matron overherd Smallbone telling Harris that the staff had been awfly quick with the cows. She didn't think much about it at the time but when they found the cows *had* been on the playing grounds all nite, there was a grate rumpus. Of corse nobody admited to anything more than a rag but the playing grounds are a mess and Mr. Figures sed he'd have to cansel the opening of the hockey season and the hole school could do prep insted of having free time.

I'm sorry about the riting. It doesn't hurt the thum onley my hands are a bit stiff. I'd sooner rite a letter than do prep so I don't mind making this a good long one.

Macmillan has just whispered to me that he's going to ask to be exkused and slip out the back door to stand under the sick wing windows and shout up to Kirkpatrick. He thinks maybe Kirkpatrick was too sick last nite and so never got to the staffroom with the message. If he gets back before the bell goes, I'll let you know.

Plese bring me two balls of string, a penknife, 2 honeys, and a bag of nails.

love, Colin

P.S. He's back. Kirkpatrick's very spotty but he came to the window. He went to the staffroom alrite to warn them about the cows. But insted of them sitting just drinking coffee, they were all standing with glasses in there hands and Mr. Figures was making a speech. Nobody notused Kirkpatrick at the door and he thort he'd better wate until the speech was over before he butted in. Then he herd Mr. Figures saying he'd like to prepose a tost to the happy couple and how delited he was that Miss Sellars and Mr. Hall were engaged. And as Macmillan had told Kirkpatrick that this was the mane objekt of the rag, the silly ass just closed the door and went back to bed. And I suppose he's still wondring why we'll never ask him to join our gang!

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six-footed FIENDS

curses on these here swatters
what kills off all the flies
don marquis, *archy and mehitabel*

A fly is in the milk-pot. Must he die
Circled by a humane society?
No, no; there, Mr. Werter takes his spoon,
Inserts it, dips the handle, and lo! soon
The little straggler, sav'd . . .
JOHN KEATS, *A Party of Lovers*

Bearing the Palm

These great Palm spiders were one of the few specimens I had that I could never bring myself to like whole-heartedly. Their bodies were the size of an egg and their long legs, spread out, would have exceeded the circumference of a saucer. They were a deep, shiny chocolate colour, and covered with a thick pelt of tawny fur. Their small glittering eyes seemed to have a nasty evil expression. Most of them, if annoyed or teased with a twig, would retreat, but one or two of them would attack. They could jump two feet in a bound, leaping six inches off the ground or more . . .

One afternoon a man turned up with two little wicker baskets, one containing a fat, beautiful, and deadly Gaboon viper, and the other, one of these revolting Palm spiders. When I had purchased them, the man asked me if I could attend to his hand which was wrapped up in a filthy piece of cloth. He had a deep wound in the thumb, which was slightly discoloured and swollen. I examined it, washed it, and put a clean bandage on. Then I asked him what had caused the wound.

"Beef done chop me," he said laconically, gesturing at the baskets.

"Good God," I said, really startled, "which beef, the snake or the other?"

"Oh no, sah, not de snake . . . dat other beef . . . it de pain me too much, Masa. You give me some kind of medicine for dis bite, sah?"

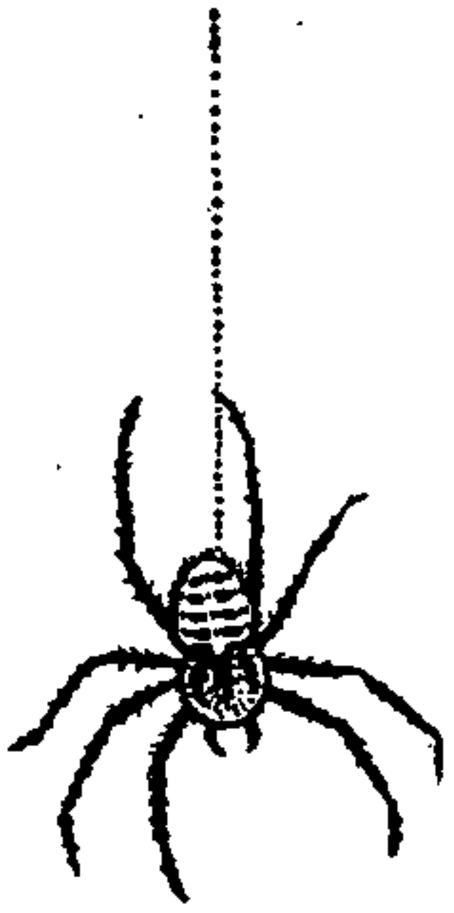
I gave him two aspirins and a strong glass of vivid yellow lime-juice, and assured him that it would cure him. He was very gratified and returned next day to ask for some more of that medicine that had done his bite so much good.

GERALD DURRELL, *The Overloaded Ark*

Swat a Life!

*twas an elderly mother spider
grown gaunt and fierce and grey
with her little ones crouched beside her
who wept as she sang this lay*

*curses on these here swatters
what kills off all the flies
for me and my little daughters
unless we eats we dies*



*swattin and swattin and swattin
tis little else you hear
and we ll soon be dead and forgotten
with the cost of living so dear . . .*

don marquis, *archy and mehitabel*

Antipathy

I drew back my hand just before it touched the mottled bark of the tree. A broad dark stripe ran both ways as far as I could see along the crumbling wood. I had taken it to be a natural marking or the effect of leaf-filtered light—the tricks played by light in the jungle are so many that we acquired at first a certain carelessness; but it did not last. The black streak wavered, thinned, and then re-formed. Myriads of red ants, in a stream three or four inches wide, marched, endlessly it seemed, up the hollow tree . . . The colour of the ants was only noticeable at second glance: and while I stood hesitating, because it was almost impossible to pass under the tree without touching it, alive as it was with stinging insects, a thread of pale grey-green, half the length of a finger, reared itself up on end from the leaf of a creeping ground-plant underfoot. It swayed in the air, palping it with a horrible suggestion of intelligence, before setting off towards my foot . . .

E. ARNOT ROBERTSON, *Four Frightened People*

Be Prepared

The householder shall make choice for the keeping of his bees of some fit and secret place in his Garden of Pleasure, in the bottome of some valley if it be possible, to the end they may the more easily rise on high to fly abroad to get their food, as also for that when they be laden, they descend the more easily downward with their load. But let us see to it especially that the place be open to the South sun, and yet notwithstanding, neither exceeding in heat nor in cold, but temperate; and that the same by hill, wall, or some other rampart be defended from windes and tempests, and so also as that they may flie their sundrie and severall waies for to get diversitie of pastures, and so againe may returne to their little cottages laden with their composition of hony.

CHARLES ESTIENNE, *La Maison Rustique*

Taking the Veil

When Mrs. Gorm (Aunt Eloise)
Was stung to death by savage bees,
Her husband (Prebendary Gorm)
Put on his veil, and took the swarm.
He's publishing a book, next May,
On "How to Make Bee-keeping Pay."

HARRY GRAHAM, *Opportunity*

Too many Ihenni

A year on this route would drive most men out of their minds. For the whole caravan track to the interior is plagued and made abominable by a tiny fly, surnamed ihenni. It is black and prolific, and its bite is like fire. There is not a single moment from day's end to day's end when it is not present in vast, hovering, blood-sucking clouds. At night it takes no rest, and if a man can manage to sit tight for three consecutive minutes he must have a hide like an elephant.

JULIAN DUGUID, *Green Hell*

Little fly upon the wall
Ain't you got no clothes at all?
Ain't you got no shimmy-shirt?
Ain't you got no petti-skirt?
Don't you never brush your hair?
'Tain't because you've got no hair,
It's because your mum don't care.
Poor fly.

ANON

Game, set and match to Miss Apse

By C. H. B. KITCHIN

WITH a tearful sniff Mrs. Apse turned over in the double bed. The early afternoon sun streamed between the broken slats of the old-fashioned venetian blind, showing up the brown patch of wallpaper over the door, where the rain had got through the roof the previous November.

Every time Maureen saw it, she said, " Can't think why you don't get this lousy room done up, you and Dad—specially you, Mum, now you have to spend so much time in bed. And if you must have blinds, why not have new ones? You've no idea how neat they are nowadays. You just pull a cord one way and they come down, and the other way when you want them to go up. It isn't as if the pair of you hadn't got quite a nice bit tucked away."

It was all very well for Maureen to talk. She'd married into the Trades Unions and Reg, her husband, who was a shop-steward and thus couldn't be sacked, earned twenty-five pounds a week just for ringing a bell to annoy the management.

Mrs. Apse and her husband didn't hold with Trades Unions. They had made their money in private enterprise—two green-grocers' shops—and though they had had to sell them a bit too soon, they weren't just living on their pensions like most of their neighbours. But Maureen didn't know—and a very good thing too that she didn't know—how much Winnie had cost them—ever since that unforgettable Vicarage fête . . .

Mrs. Apse shut her eyes and saw for the thousandth time the Vicar approaching her with his knowing, affectionate smile. " Mrs. Apse, allow me to congratulate you on being the mother of such a prodigy. You really mean to tell me your daughter has had no proper tuition? Incredible! Quite seriously, I suggest that—if—er—your circumstances permit—you should consider letting her take up tennis as a career. Her performance this

afternoon has dazzled us all. Miss Greene had the generosity to say, 'We shall see that girl on the centre court at Wimbledon!' High praise from a vanquished opponent, isn't it? Think it over, my dear Mrs. Apse—and you, Mr. Apse—think it over!"

They thought it over. Winnie had tennis lessons from a professional, a north-countryman, who said cautiously that she "framed" very well. She played in a local tournament and won it with ease. Three weeks later she was runner-up in another tournament so grand that the results were given in the newspaper, and a critic on one of the Sunday papers wrote, "We shall have to keep our eyes open for young Miss Apse." She went from triumph to triumph with few setbacks.

Maureen was jealous, of course. In those days, Maureen was running after young men. She was a good deal prettier than Winnie, whose fat, honest face had a lumpish charm only when she smiled, and she knew very well how to attract the shoddy male eye. But a girl needs money to make the most of herself, and her parents seemed to think she could live on nothing.

For some time she had hopes of catching a bookmaker's son, but when she found that he hadn't the smallest intention of marrying her, she took up with the shop-steward, even though he might be a bit below her class. Still, he was a fine figure of a man. Even Mrs. Apse, his future mother-in-law, lying awake in the small hours of the night, couldn't help comparing him as a bedfellow with the shrimp-like mannikin who snored by her side. So, when her husband announced, "Look here, Mum, this marriage has got to be stopped. We can't have Maureen letting us down like this," she put her foot down and said, "Maybe the girl knows best."

How right she had been. The marriage was a success. Maureen became nicer and her shop-steward husband did nothing to upset his in-laws. He didn't even quarrel with them over politics. He bought a small car, and brightened many a Sunday afternoon for them by taking them out for a drive.

He had even managed somehow to arrange that on that very day someone else should do the bell-ringing at his works, so that he should be free to drive the whole family to Winnie's tournament. Mrs. Apse would have sat in front, delighted to be seen beside such a handsome chauffeur, while her husband, Maureen, and Winnie were squashed in the narrow back seat.

It would have been a glorious expedition, apart from all the excitement of the tennis, but when Mrs. Apse started to dress herself at eight o'clock on that day of all days in the year, she felt all the familiar symptoms of an attack, and went wretchedly back to bed with the knowledge that she would have to stay

there at least for the next twenty-four hours. "Rest is the best medicine I can prescribe," the doctor had said. "If you'll only rest enough, you may easily live to be a hundred."

In the normal course, Winnie would have stayed behind to look after her mother, but that was out of the question. Maureen made such a faint-hearted offer that Mrs. Apse didn't bother to reply. Her husband then suggested that he should stay—or should he ask Mrs. Betts from across the road to slip over for a couple of hours? "She'd love to watch our Winnie on the telly."

Mrs. Apse shook her head. "I don't want no strangers here, seeing me cry when she makes a bad shot—or it might be tears of joy, mightn't it? You go with the young ones and enjoy yourself. Not that I shan't see a good deal more of the game than you will, twisting your necks, while your eyes pop out of your head." So the four of them started off for the tournament, leaving her alone in the dingy, damp-stained bedroom.

The TV set had been brought so near the bed that her hand was within easy reach of the knobs. Luckily it suited her eyes that way. Long before Winnie's match was due to start, she experimented with all the controls, though her husband had advised her not to meddle with them. But it passed the time. More than once she produced a chaos of whirling lines and a humming crescendo suggestive of an impending explosion. Then by a lucky accident, all was clear.

Three commentators were discussing the men's doubles—tall Len McLean, a well-known professional, Chub Chaffley, an ex-champion from the States, and Barbara Sweete, who had won the Ladies' Singles a good many years before at Frenchley Park.

Len said, "You know, Chub, I rather think Barbara has an amusing story about how she first became acquainted with Tommy Prinslett. She said I wasn't to ask her for it this afternoon, but if you ask her, with that grin of yours, I'm sure she won't refuse to tell it you."

"Wa'al, Barbara, I don't know what my grin's worth, but if it gets the story out of you, here goes!" He contorted his fat little face obligingly. Laughter, in which Barbara joined.

"I must say, Chub, you're very hard to resist, though as a matter of fact I really hadn't meant to give Tommy away like this. But p'r'aps he won't mind. After all, he was almost a schoolboy when it happened. Well, it was at the Burlington tournament and in those days a good many of the players put up at the Queen's Hotel. At least, that's where I stayed and Tommy

did too. It was his first season in open tournaments—I wish I could say the same for myself, but I must confess to being an older vintage—and few people knew him by sight or even by name. Well, the second morning when I went to the bathroom—there was rather a shortage of them in the hotel—I was pleasantly surprised to find it marked, Vacant, and walked straight in. As I was hanging my dressing-gown on the door, a figure sprang out of the bath and grabbed at a towel. It was Tommy, who had somehow failed to lock the door. Then I really think I did show some presence of mind. I said, 'Oh, Violet, I'm most frightfully sorry,' and—"

Mrs. Apse gave a snort of contempt. She'd heard that one before. The three commentators continued their backchat, but instead of listening to them, she let her imagination stray to the coming ordeal, which every moment seemed more terrible.

Suppose Winnie served four double faults in a row, lost her nerve or her temper, burst into hysterical tears? The name of Apse would stink through the length of Great Britain—and all that good money would have been thrown away. But it wasn't likely that Winnie would do any such thing. On the whole she was too phlegmatic a player, hardly seeming to care whether she won or lost—unlike those temperamental foreigners, who were more like film stars than people playing a game for the love of it. What would this Olivia de something be like? Dark, of course, with a fiery, evil-tempered look—the kind who'd throw a knife if you laughed at her. And Winnie might laugh. As a child she used to have fits of the giggles over things that weren't really funny. "Oh, dear God, grant that she doesn't have one this afternoon. Let her beat this Olivia into a cocked hat!"

Spots before the eyes. "Is *your* girlfriend as fresh as *my* girlfriend? . . . the new double-acting deodoriser in the puce capsule and in the new pack, too . . ."

Mrs. Apse turned desperately away from the set and prayed again. "Oh, dear God, send a cloudburst or an earthquake, let Olivia fall down with a heat-stroke, a heart-attack. Do anything to spare me this agony. I never thought it would be as bad as this. It must be because I'm not well. That's it, I'm not well and my nerves have got upset. It isn't as if I've never seen Winnie play in a match before. I've seen her heaps of times. But this is so different, it means so very, very much to us. Oh, Winnie, my poor little girl, how can you go through with it? Say you don't feel well or have a pain in your foot. This can't be real, it's far too much to bear. I won't look, I'll just listen. That may not be quite so bad."

By now the three commentators were at it again. ". . . Miss

Olivia da Solera, the first Parasolian ever to play on these courts. I think, Chub, you've met this attractive young lady before. Perhaps you'll give us a bit of her history?"

"Wa'al, Len, I guess the foist time I struck Olivia da Solera was way down in Poppahocket two years ago last fall. She'd just graduated from . . ."

He went on and on. When was he going to say something about Winnie? "Wa'al, I guess I'd better ask Len to tell you something about Miss Apse, Great Britain's hope against the young lady from Parasolia. But I reckon I oughta kinda apologise in advance in case I call her Miss Hapse, which I'm told I've a way of doing when I'm het up. Miss Hapse sounds sorta unlucky, so if this charming young lady will excoose me taking the liberty, I figure it'll be best if I just call her Winnie—and Winnie the winner I think she may very well be. Now, Len, over to you."

"Thank you, Chub. Well, here they come—the two contestants in the quarter-final. Miss Apse on the left looking quite cool and calm in a—but while the two girls are having a knock-up, perhaps Barbara will tell us what they are wearing."

Barbara had it pat. "Miss Solera, who's on the farther side of the court, is wearing a short-sleeved ninon-de-rose paresseuse caught up at the arms with diamantés ruchés below a half-inch insertion of Phoenician gold filigree. Her jet black hair is swept in two parallel rouleaux behind the ears, meeting at the back in a nœud d'amour. Her shoes . . . Miss Apse's costume is very practical, a plain white zephyrine blouse without any frills. It isn't everyone who would wear it, of course, but it has a sensible, matter-of-fact look that suits her . . ."

Mrs. Apse gasped with indignation. "If Garrows' best isn't good enough for them, what is I wonder! So our Winnie's really there in front of those crowds. I'll have to watch her, even if it kills me."

Laboriously she swung her body on to its right side. Yes, Winnie was there, though you could only see her back as she sent ball after ball straight over the quivering net. The whole picture quivered, as if it were agitated by cross-currents of feeling.

What was Dad thinking about? He'd be proud, certainly, and a bit nervous, but he wasn't one to get worked up about things. In that way, Winnie took after him, while Maureen—It was harder to be sure what Maureen would be thinking just then. Of course she'd want her younger sister to win, but she'd want it for her own sake, not for Winnie's. A mixture of pride and jealousy, that would be it. And if Winnie lost, a mixture

of shame and smug satisfaction. "I told you so—pouring out all that money."

Reg would be much warmer in his sympathies, shop-steward though he was. He'd always had a soft spot for Winnie. In fact, just once or twice, Mrs. Apse had wondered if in some ways he didn't prefer Winnie to Maureen. If so, and Maureen knew it, that would explain quite a lot—but not everything. There had always been a touch of meanness about Maureen. She must take after old mother Apse who was ninety-two and close-fisted as hell . . .

Good heavens, the match had begun. Mrs. Apse opened her eyes, which she had shut during her meditation, and gazed at the screen. The first game was already over and the players were changing ends, the Parasolian gliding with proud, elegant steps as if she were a prima ballerina performing before an audience in Moscow, while Winnie ambled round like a cow in search of a new bit of pasture.

"Miss Apse to serve."

Winnie served a fault. Mrs. Apse had been to a good many tournaments but she had never been able to master the rules of lawn tennis. She knew that if you didn't get the ball over the net you lost a point, but if you did get it over, she wasn't clear between which of all those white lines it had to fall. Well, that one was well over, though the Parasolian didn't attempt to touch it.

"Love fifteen."

That meant one up to Winnie—but, oh dear, it didn't. They always called the server's score first. (How often had Winnie said, "If you can't remember anything else, Mummy, do remember that.")

"Love thirty."

This was dreadful. Mrs. Apse clutched the sheet and twisted it in her hot fingers. Winnie served again—a fine shot right in the corner. The Parasolian tossed it back carelessly, half an inch too low. A ball-boy darted across the court.

"Fifteen-thirty."

That was better, much better. Mrs. Apse felt suddenly almost well, and before she had finished a prayer of thanksgiving, the umpire called, "Thirty all."

Chub said in his American voice, "I reckon if Winnie can go on serving like that, Miss Solera won't find it too easy to break through."

The next serve produced a long rally, which confused Mrs. Apse so much that she didn't know who had won it, till the clapping died down and the umpire called, "Forty-thirty."

Winnie used to say, " It always feels nice when you're safely at forty." Mrs. Apse shut her eyes again. Such happiness was almost too great to bear.

" Deuce . . . Advantage Miss da Solera . . . Deuce . . . Advantage Miss Apse . . . Deuce . . ." It went on and on. " Game to Miss da Solera. She leads two-love in the first set."

" Miss Solera serving to Miss Apse." A fault, then another. " I must say, the crowd seemed a little surprised at that decision . . . Yes, Len, and Miss Solera was too, the way she's looking at the linesman. She's a very emotional young lady and it could be that—oh, a fine return, worthy of Christine Truman at her best."

" Love thirty . . . Love forty."

Chub went on, " Three points to Winnie for a break-through. Now's her chance. Will she take it? "

" Game to Miss Apse. Miss da Solera leads by two games to one in the first set."

Winnie's first game. Mrs. Apse gave a sigh of ecstasy and, as she did so, felt a peculiar pain spread through her chest. It wasn't intense, but there was something strangely intimate about it that presaged much worse to come. Was she really ill, at last? Should she ring the doctor? The telephone had been moved to her bedroom, just in case—but of course they had all assured her she'd never need to. It was excitement that made her feel as she did. If only her breathing could be a little easier. Perhaps she ought to switch off for a few minutes, to give herself time to calm down?

She turned the wrong knob. Instead of vanishing, the picture blurred into lines flashing spitefully at her from the right-hand top corner of the screen, while an up-stage voice announced, " That was a speaker for the Church of Scotland giving us his views on the Wolfenden Report." The lines settled down into a picture of people pompously leaving what looked like a town hall—police, motors, and a procession of men with fluttering gowns.

Mrs. Apse angrily turned the knob back again. Lines flashed at her from the opposite corner of the screen. " I must get it right, I *must*. If it kills me I'll see the match right through to the end. O dear God, help me, do, to get the picture back." The screen cleared and there was Winnie picking up a ball someone had thrown to her.

" Love forty . . . Fault . . . Let, second service. Fault . . . Game to Miss da Solera, who leads by five games to one in the first set . . ."

"A penny for your thoughts, Chub. What advice would you give Miss Apse now, if you were coaching her for the Wightman Cup?"

"Wa'al, Len, I guess the foist section of my advice 'ud be pretty obvious. I'd say, 'For goodness' sake, Winnie, stop serving so many double faults. Go easy on that second serve of yours and go a bit easier on your foist serve too. You can't hope to beat a crack player like Miss Solera by serving seven double faults in the foist set.' Next, I'd say she's gotta think up some way of beating Miss Solera's forehand drive. I figure Winnie kinda sorta oughta contrive a bit more spin on her backhand. She's gotten quite a useful shot there and more than once it's been touch and go with Olivia to counter it. Just a little more spin there and I reckon Winnie 'ud really have her guessing."

"Thank you, Chub. I think you've probably got something there. It's Miss Apse at two-five serving to save the first set."

Spots before the eyes. "Is *your* girlfriend as fresh as *my* girlfriend? . . . in the puce capsule and in the new pack too!"

Mrs. Apse turned on to her left side. The pain had almost gone, but there was a space for it in her chest, as if it were a permanent resident there and would soon come back, like a housewife who had just slipped out for a minute to visit a shop round the corner. So Winnie was going to lose the first set. Dad would be smiling his sickly little smile, like that time in the war when he bought a ton of potatoes on the cheap and found them all rotten. Maureen would be looking at Reg—if there wasn't some other man she preferred to look at—with that sly, vinegary expression of hers, as who should say, "I always told you Winnie was not top-class," while Reg would be staring straight ahead, unhappy and sweating, as if he had rung his bell in the works and no one had taken any notice of it. Still, he did want Winnie to win. He was a good fellow at heart and Maureen might have done much worse than marry him. Again Mrs. Apse had a quick vision of him deputising for Mr. Apse in the marriage bed.

What a wicked thought for an old and ailing woman! She blushed, praying that it wouldn't affect her prayers for Winnie's success, and turned over on to her right side.

"Game to Miss Apse. She leads by three games to one in the second set."

"Any comments, Chub?"

"Nothing special, Len, except that it seems to me Winnie's figured out how to find the weak spots in Olivia's defence. I've always said I'd hand it to Winnie Apse to play a losing game without getting rattled, but I've never felt I could say that about Olivia. She seems to have the sorta temperament your English

summer is supposed to have, and her weather just now just isn't set at fair. That backhand spin drive of Winnie's from the baseline sure had her guessing . . ."

"O God, let our dear little daughter Winnie win this great match and many more. Punish not the sins of her poor, foolish old mother by making her daughter lose. She's a good girl, through and through. Let her teach that sneering, sarcastic over-dressed foreigner that an English girl is worth every bit of her."

At the end of her prayer Mrs. Apse fell into a doze, and it wasn't so much the excited voices of the commentators or the applause of the crowd which awakened her, as the pain in her chest. At first it was not too severe—the sort of pain a half-sleep can keep at bay—but when the umpire called, "Game to Miss da Solera, who leads by four games to one in the final set," and Mrs. Apse regained her full consciousness, it seemed suddenly to enlarge its dimensions, as if resolved at all costs to prevent her from attending to the match.

"Well, Chub, last time I asked you what advice you'd give to Miss Apse, you seemed to have a miraculous effect on her play and she won the second set by six games to three. If it isn't a form of cheating, I wonder if you could do the same thing again."

"Wa'al, Len, with Winnie trailing four-one in the final set, Miss da Solera to serve, I guess it isn't too easy to know what to say that 'ud help Winnie to scrape out of this predicament. I still think if she could get just a little more under-cut on those backhand volleys of hers, she might have more of a chance . . ."

Gasping for breath, Mrs. Apse murmured back at him, "I can't listen to you and watch the game and bear this pain. Something will have to go. Perhaps if I don't listen or watch, but just pray . . . O God, let our Winnie win—let our Winnie win—if only I can keep that up right to the end . . ."

"Game to Miss da Solera. She leads by five games to one in the final set."

"O God, let our Winnie win."

There she was, serving. Mrs. Apse opened her eyes and looked guiltily at the screen. Bang—right into the middle of the net. Another bang, but this time the ball, after quivering, toppled over into the service court.

"Let—second service."

"I can't keep this up. The strain is too much for me. I won't look, I won't listen. O God, let our Winnie win . . ."

"Love fifteen . . . Love thirty . . . Love forty."

"Three match points for Miss da Solera. Now, Chub, your last chance."

"I guess, Len, you've set me a difficult assignment. There's always a chance that Winnie may serve an ace, or three aces, rather, which 'ud take her to dooce. There! What did I say?"

"Fifteen-forty . . . Thirty-forty."

"Gee, girlie, one more of those—and she's done it! Well done, Winnie Apse!"

Advantage this way, then that. Mrs. Apse rocked from side to side in an attempt to shake the pain out of her body. But she could still pray, though it wasn't easy with this enemy thudding between her throat and her lungs. "O God, let our Winnie win, let her win, let her win . . ."

Advantage Miss da Solera.

Once more Mrs. Apse forced herself round to face the screen. The ball banged into the middle of the net. "Match point"—oh, but that didn't matter. Winnie must win however many match points she had against her. The pain was everywhere now. It was the whole world, but beyond the world there was Winnie fighting for the championship, and beyond her and right above in the sky, there was God.

And when Winnie served the last of her double faults, it wasn't the umpire, Len or Chub or Miss Barbara Sweete, but a voice from Heaven which proclaimed three times, "*Game, set, and match to Miss Apse.*"

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LEISURE PLEASURE

Strictly for fun, another rhyming quiz with a seaside and farm holiday slant. Each clue leads to two words, each of two syllables, which rhyme in both their syllables, i.e. "Hirsute pursuit" qualifies, but not "Hirsute swimsuit." An example of clue and answer :

Saucy bird—Dander gander

1. *Honeymooners' compartment*
2. *First glimpse of home from home*
3. *Breakfast fishlet*
4. *Beach umbrella revenue*
5. *Sporting equipment*
6. *Log book entry*
7. *Italian tower permit*
8. *Shellfish skirmish*
9. *Shingle hater*
10. *"Eyes down!"*
11. *Flirts with the girls*
12. *Twilight stroll*
13. *Cattle warning*
14. *Dairy knife*
15. *Shy duck*
16. *Dumb cluck!*
17. *Mending roof*
18. *Maltsters' confab!*
19. *Bird at rear entrance*
20. *Train stoppers*
21. *Argosy!!!*

Answers next month

GHOST MONEY

The attaché case opened—
just one little peep, I thought

BY GERALD KERSH

SHAKING his feathery grey head over my old whipcord trousers, suppressing a sigh in the manner of a family doctor at the deathbed of a difficult but time-honoured patient, Mr. Vara, the demon tailor, said, " We must face it." He was kind but firm. " I should be the last man in the world to belittle first-rate stuff somewhat the worse for wear—" Here, he pushed up his spectacles and looked at his reflection in the fly-speckled mirror.

" But if I draw any more thread out of the waistband to darn invisibly the bottom of these trouser legs, and vice-versa, there will be nothing left of this garment but a G-string and a pair of spats. I am sorry." He shrugged.

" I've had those trousers twenty years," I said.

" An old coat is an old friend, as the saying goes; but old trousers are mere hangers-on," said Mr. Vara.

" Perhaps you could just *try*? " I begged.

" Well, get into the cubicle and let me press your suit while I think."

" It doesn't need pressing," I said.

Mr. Vara gave me one of his incredulous, pitying looks. " Everything needs pressing, all the time," he said. "Especially trousers. This is the twentieth century. Up to 1900, trousers were round, like sleeves. Then one day my old teacher, Schultz, of Savile Row, said to King Edward the Seventh, ' As from now on all trousers are to have a knife-edge crease. Is this clear? ' The King said, ' Yes, Mr. Schultz '—and so it was, even after Schultz finally quarrelled with the King for criticising the hang of a sleeve. Schultz even insisted that officers of the Brigade of Guards have their bootlaces pressed every morning. And *you* presume to argue the point?

" That is where I should be today, in Savile Row, laying down the law to heads of state. But Fate, or Mrs. Vara—same thing—decrees that I waste myself in this rat hole of a shop. Rat hole? Not even that. Rats desert a sinking shop.

I joke so as not to weep. And you imply by your attitude that I solicit your business!"

I said, "I didn't mean to imply anything, Mr. Vara."

He went right on, "I could be a rich man if I were a chaser of customers. But I have always given a little more than I have got—and proud of it! My temperament has driven me from pillar to post. It is my nature to do things for nothing, to advise, assist. That is why children like me—they can recognise a sucker on sight. So I cannot help being poor.

"And yet, if it were not for my peculiar character, I should go hungry. This is not a paradox—I mean to say that a lot of people who have come to Vara when they were in trouble remember him, you'd be surprised how many years later. Actually, I don't believe anybody forgets you, ever—I am talking about people who enjoy remembering me, who would cross a busy street to shake hands with me. Others don't count. To this very day I have as customers people who used to call me Papa Vara twenty-five years ago, when they were children, and I had a shop like this in the Bronx. They were always coming to me to mend their torn clothes free of charge—many is the beating I saved some of them by means of a few well-placed stitches. I was also surgeon for ruptured golliwogs, ripped teddybears, and mutilated rag dolls.

"There must have been three or four hundred children, all calling me Papa—you should have heard Mrs. Vara on this subject! . . . Did you ever hear of Gerda Grühn, the actress?"

Mr. Vara paused. I nodded. Who had not heard of Gerda Grühn? She played Bibi in Claude Willy's *Mad Apples of Sodom*, and swept the world; failed in motion pictures, but came away from Hollywood several million dollars richer—or so the Sunday papers said—and even scored a succès d'estime with a volume of poetry entitled *Insights*.

"Don't tell me you mended *her* rag doll," I said, laughing.

Mr. Vara said, "No. I made her one, with a fur hat. She still keeps it as a mascot. But her name was Gertie Green then, and she was the poorest of the poor. Also, she was the ugliest of the ugly and the awkwardest of the awkward. Her complexion was mud, her hair was string, and she was so shy as to seem almost an idiot. Her father had run away. Her mother worked sometimes late in the evening, running a sewing machine in a Seventh Avenue dressmaker's loft, so the poor child was lonely—so pitiful, with her latchkey tied on a string round her scraggy little neck! I made her welcome in my warm shop—a dump, but cosy to her—and told her stories, and gave her things to eat; and I showed her how to hold her head so

that people could see her eyes, which were amber flecked with gold like Danziger liqueur. I told her how beauty is something better than Peach Melba—that it is of nerve and spirit and intelligence, not stacked sugar and whipped cream—and I made her read to me, to bring out her voice, which was soft but powerful.

"So, with what was born in her, she became the great actress you know: Gerda Grühn. And she is still like a daughter to me. And there are still times—"

Perversely, Mr. Vara stopped. One deals diplomatically with the demon tailor. If I had said, "Well, go on," or something of that sort, he would have finished pressing my suit and dismissed me unceremoniously. So I said, "I hate to interrupt, Mr. Vara, but I have an appointment with my publisher." That did it.

"Let him wait!" said Mr. Vara. He continued . . .

. . . There are still times when my urchins come to their Papa Vara to be spared a spanking. Now some of them wear three-hundred-dollar suits and thousand-dollar watches; only the zippers of discretion get jammed, and the seams of pride come undone. I am not being poetical—your everyday self is a kind of suit of clothes you have stitched yourself into. So you speak of catching somebody with his trousers down, et cetera. The fact is, I am also handy at invisibly darning affairs as well as garments; anybody's but my own—tailors always go shabby.

Now my little Gertie Green, as I was saying, always remembered me with affection, and for this I have always been grateful. That she came to me in the days of her glory was good; but I liked her best for coming to me when she was in trouble—that was a proof of love. I was happy for her sake when she came singing into this shop and wanted to set me up on Fifth Avenue; but I was happy for both our sakes when she crept in, struck with that dark night of the soul which sometimes comes down over artists, and cried for comfort, and I could give it to her.

She was happy when she fell in love with a nice young man named Cheyney Wood, but miserable when she thought that although he loved her too, his love was a kind of unearthly adoration inspired by his reading a little book of poems she had published. I don't know if you ever read it. She wouldn't give me a copy—she said she was ashamed of that book—so I bought one for one dollar eighty-five. A nickel a poem, and not worth it. I mean to say—

In ecstasy of osmosis bite, bite,
through twilight membranes of
Being,
each into each—

—how come? I remember these lines because I forgetfully took the book home, and Mrs. Vara got hold of it."

"What sort of talk is osmosis?" she wanted to know. She thought it was a bone disease. Talked herself into it and went for a week to an osteopath.

I said to Gertie, "I dare say when you read it, this stuff sounds good—you could make an audience encore an income-tax demand. I don't understand it myself. But if your young man likes it, good luck to him!"

She said, "Papa Vara, I don't ever want to talk about those awful poems again."

"We'll forget them, the same as everybody else will," I said. "If this Mr. Cheyney Wood loves you for this alone—"

"No, no, he loves me for myself. I've told him all about you. He wants to meet you."

"Any time, sweetheart," I said. And so I met him. Gertie must have spoken well of me—he seemed surprised that it was only a hand I offered him, and not a wing. A well-bred young fellow, Cheyney Wood, very fair and delicate, high-strung, sensitive. It was easy to see that this pair were in love. Well, if it was my blessing they wanted, they had it.

They were nicely suited. Not only did he worship the ground Gertie walked on; he, also, lived for Art, and owned one of these galleries where they have in the window sculpture made of iron wire and pictures of triangles. Luckily, he had plenty of money of his own, Gertie told me; he was not a businessman, she said. They were going to live in that fine apartment house that Stanford White built near the park . . . and please, wasn't there anything they could do for me?

"Since we are practically neighbours, you could give me your pressing," I said.

So, as you may have read in the newspapers, Gerda Grühn and Cheyney Wood were married, and there seemed no reason why they should not live happily ever afterwards—give a little, take a little—as a surprising number of couples often manage to do. I saw one or the other of them every week or so. There is a distinct limit to the number of ways you can say, in everyday speech, that you are steeped in marital bliss. I was beginning to find Gertie's and Cheyney's happiness just a little bit repetitive. Then one afternoon, when Gertie came to pay a trifling bill—she always liked to keep such matters on an intimate footing,

turning them into little social occasions, and bringing a sweet cake—it suddenly occurred to me that she was looking strained and nervous.

'One feels a delicacy in mentioning such things—you know? So I said nothing. I tried to make light conversation, but she didn't want to stay and chat. She kept looking at her watch. So—we all have our off days, I thought to myself, and tried to put her at her ease by pretending to be busy. It was her custom to enclose whatever she happened to owe me in an envelope with a comic greetings card. Opening her bag now to take it out, she fumbled so badly that the bag slipped and emptied itself on to the counter. There was a shower of powder compacts, lipstick, keys, and so forth—and a fat manila envelope which, being unsealed, spilt out in its turn a mass of money, neat packets of five- and ten-dollar bills, all wrinkled and used.

I picked up one packet of fives which had fallen to the floor. You know how one notices trivial things in a moment of surprise? I saw that some joker had pencilled a moustache on the face of Abraham Lincoln, on the topmost bill. "Here's a lot of money to be carrying loose in this neighbourhood," I said. "What, are you paying—ransom money to a kidnapper?"

She laughed, and said, "You always think the best of me, Papa Vara. How do you know I haven't kidnapped somebody, and this is ransom money I've just collected?" And then she was her confident, vital self again; and if I had been sitting in an auditorium instead of standing face to face with her, even I should never have guessed what hard work went into her assumption of that attitude.

So I was worried. It showed in my face. I told Mrs. Vara that I was working out a problem, and not to bother me. She called me everything she could think of—Charlie Chan, Perry Mason, Sherlock Holmes, Einstein, The Thin Man, Nero Wolf—but I kept wondering about Gerda Grühn, my little Gertie. She was a goodhearted girl: perhaps that bundle of money was to help a friend? Then why not a cheque, or a draft? Was she putting it on horses? Again, why pay a bookie in old bills of small denomination, which are harder to get than new money—if you can afford either? Was it possible that she was enslaved by a drug habit? I tried everything, but nothing fitted.

"Eat," Mrs. Vara told me, "eat!"

I said, "This is the nicest meat loaf you've ever made, but I've got no appetite."

She said, "It happens to be codfish patties," and left the table in high dudgeon.

I went to the shop early next morning, not having been able

to sleep. My first customer was a young-old man who looked as if he, too, had not passed a quiet night; only his had been a voluntary insomnia. He must have been a goodlooking fellow in a shoddy way, before he contracted a dry-martini eye and a bloody-mary complexion. He had a smile like opening a piano, and sharp-cut clothes—good fabric that had been in bad company —Italian shoes, French tie, and on his curly great head one of those stingy-brim hats. He put down a dinner-suit, limp but still warm, and said, "I ripped it a bit under the arm, and somebody upset some champagne in my lap. Could you fix it for this evening?"

"It will be four dollars seventy-five," I tell him.

"I'd better pay you now," says he, and pulls out some loose money. You know how, if you have several bills in your hand, the first you will break will be the oldest and dirtiest? Well, he drops a very crumpled fiver on the counter. I smooth it out. And what do I see? The head of Abraham Lincoln with a moustache pencilled in!

I thought fast. "I may have to leave the shop early," I said, "and I do not employ a messenger. Better let me deliver this suit to your house a little later, eh?"

"Sure," said this type, "the name is Lafferty, and here is the address on West 74th. Right?"

"Right."

When he was gone I examined the five-dollar bill very carefully. No doubt about it—it was the same one I had noticed the day before. My blood ran faster. The mystery, such as it was, had got darker and the plot was thickening. This Lafferty, evidently, must be somehow dangerous, in that he was not in the least reluctant to tell his name and address. Everything about him indicated a low Broadway type sitting pretty on safe ground: somebody with an ace or a writ of habeas corpus up his sleeve, playing "heads I win, tails you lose."

I repaired his repulsive suit. It was a degenerate kind of garment, too snug at the waist, too narrow in the sleeves, and just a shade too blue; the buttonhole in the lapel was flabby and dead from too many carnations; and over it all hung a vague smell of somebody else's wife and somebody else's wine. So I steamed some of the hangover out of it, and hung up the RETURN IMMEDIATELY sign, and walked over to West 74th Street.

It was a good house before it went to the dogs. Such buildings pass from hand to hand, and each successive proprietor abuses them a little more and a little more to squeeze the last penny of revenue from them, giving them no rest, painting and patching them to the last. There was no porter. A melancholy janitor

was spraying the building's throat with perfumed disinfectant—I mean, cleaning the lobby. I said to him, " Party of the name of Lafferty? "

He shrugged.

" Isn't he Lafferty the bookie? " I asked.

" He ain't Lafferty the nobody, far as I know," the man said. He was one of those shrugging, loose-mouthed, world-weary, underprivileged creatures that are paid to haunt the cellars of old houses in Manhattan.

" What does he do for a living? " I asked.

" He don't do nothing for a living, far as I know."

" Married? "

" Not far as I know. He's smart. Why buy milk if you're friendly with the cow? " He winked. " You'd be surprised what a nice class of dames goes for fellas like—" He stopped, and stared at me suspiciously.

I gave him some of my cards and a dollar. " Any business you send my way, there's a little commission for you. O.K.? "

" O.K."

I said, " I dare say you've seen one or two of my customers here . . ." At this, I gave him a horrid wink. " There's a big redhead comes to see Lafferty, I know for a fact—she was here yesterday."

He said, " Nah, not far as I know. You mean a brunette."

" No, she was a redhead."

" A brunette, in a veil. She had *class*! I like a dame to wear a veil," said he.

My heart sank, but I said, ". I would have bet she was a big redhead in a green suit."

" You'd lose. Far as I know, she was a slim brunette in a black coat."

" No skin off my nose," I said, getting into the lift. Lafferty answered the door in a brocade robe. I caught a glimpse of a dim room at the end of a tiny passage—half a dozen slices of mouldy sunlight slipping through the slats of venetian blinds and lying half in and half out of an overflowing ashtray on the arm of an overstuffed chair—and a whiff of gin mixed with shaving lotion and stale cigarette smoke. *Gertie, Gertie—how could you so betray yourself and me?* I cried, in my heart. Then Lafferty took his suit and shut me out in the peeling corridor.

Sick and bewildered, I went back to the shop. I tried to reason with myself: Gertie Green, the last of the least of my urchins is dead and buried; here is Gerda Grühn, a grown woman who has made good the hard way. She is thirty-four years old. Somewhere in her past there was this person Lafferty

—personable, possibly charming once upon a time. And so now, out of kindness and for old times' sake, she gives him some money.

To which, a nasty, knowing little voice at the back of my head said, That's right—in small used bills! Commonsense told me to mind my own business; and I answered Commonsense right back, No, sir!

When my mind sees for a fact something my instinct says is false, one or the other wants examining!

So I made a parcel of some pressing that was to be delivered to the Woods, and carried it over to their place. I said to Gertie, "My child, you know that in me you see somebody who, if he is a friend, is a friend to the bitter end?"

"Why, yes. What's the matter, Papa Vara?"

"This is the matter. I am sick to the heart. You have the right not to answer me, but I have no right not to ask you—*Why are you giving money to Lafferty?*"

Her self-control was something magnificent. She said, "Because he is blackmailing me. It is not any ordinary matter, Papa Vara. It's almost impossible to explain—"

"You insult my understanding, child. I was not an impossible man to explain to twenty-odd years ago when you were all in pieces like a broken puzzle, and alone in the dark," I said.

That got to her. She said, "You will laugh at me. You would be right to laugh at me—it seems so absurd."

I said, "Very likely it is absurd. But children are never to be laughed at. Come . . ."

She went off at a tangent, "I love Cheyney, and Cheyney loves me. I think I told you once before, I'm almost afraid of the way he worships me, as a kind of embodiment of artistic integrity. He has created a goddess-image of me."

"So what then? Mrs. Vara has created a shrimp-image of me. Image! . . . What have you done wrong, or indiscreet, to pay blackmail to that souse in the stingy-brim hat?"

"If it were the usual kind of foolishness," she said, "I could tell Cheyney all about it. But it's nothing like that at all. Do you remember my book of poems, *Insights*? You remember that I wouldn't give you a copy?"

"You said you were ashamed of it. It was bad, but not all that bad," I said.

"I was ashamed to give you a copy, Papa Vara, because I didn't write those poems," said Gertie.

"Personally, I should be proud not to have written all that business about osmosis," I said.

"Yes, yes. But Cheyney thinks I did write *Insights*. We first met on account of that wretched book. And I've autographed

hundreds of copies, and accepted congratulations from all over the world—all under false pretences—and some of the poems are in an anthology, *The Living End.* A publicity man wrote them for me, for a stunt; and I allowed it, like a fool."

"This man Lafferty has evidence of this?" I asked.

"Lafferty *wrote* them," she said. "Unless I pay him, he'll expose me."

"Let him," I said. "A nine-day wonder. In a fortnight, the world has forgotten."

"Yes, but Cheyney would never see me in the same light again."

Extraordinary, you may think? Far-fetched? Not so. A financial genius will go on digging one hole to fill another, knowing that he must collapse in the end—yet refusing to know. A crooked actuary will try to outwit his own arithmetic. And an actress will make a romance out of selling her self-esteem to keep hopped up on unearned praise. "Be ashamed, Gertie Green, be ashamed!" I said.

She replied, quietly, "I am ashamed. And desperate."

"How much are you paying this Lafferty?"

"He asked for five thousand dollars the first time. I gave it to him. Now he wants a thousand a month," she said.

I said, "Tax-free, of course. Do you realise how much you must earn to pay somebody twelve thousand dollars a year?"

"I know what taxation is, Papa Vara. I'm not a twentieth part as rich as I'm supposed to be."

"But Cheyney Wood has money?"

"Yes, but our incomes are kept separate. We don't mix our financial affairs. Our relationship—"

"All right, all right, enough of your relationship."

"He won't even take commission for the sale of a picture," said she tenderly.

"Well," I said, sighing—with relief, I think, because I didn't want Gertie to be messed up in a sordid romance; although this was far more complicated—and patting her on the head, "well, let Papa Vara think a day or two. Who knows? I am only a little man, but a mouse can stop a power station. Wait."

"My heart is a lot lighter now," she said, "just for having talked to you, Papa Vara. There's a sort of magic about you. How could you possibly have found out about all this?"

This was all very fine; but what was I going to do about it all? In a story-book I would no doubt lure Lafferty into the shop, offer to press his suit free of charge, get him undressed in a cubicle, and then threaten to brand him with a hot pressing iron unless, et cetera, et cetera. But I am not Hopalong Cassidy.

I was thinking fruitlessly late that afternoon when Cheyney Wood came in. "You look a little tired," I said.

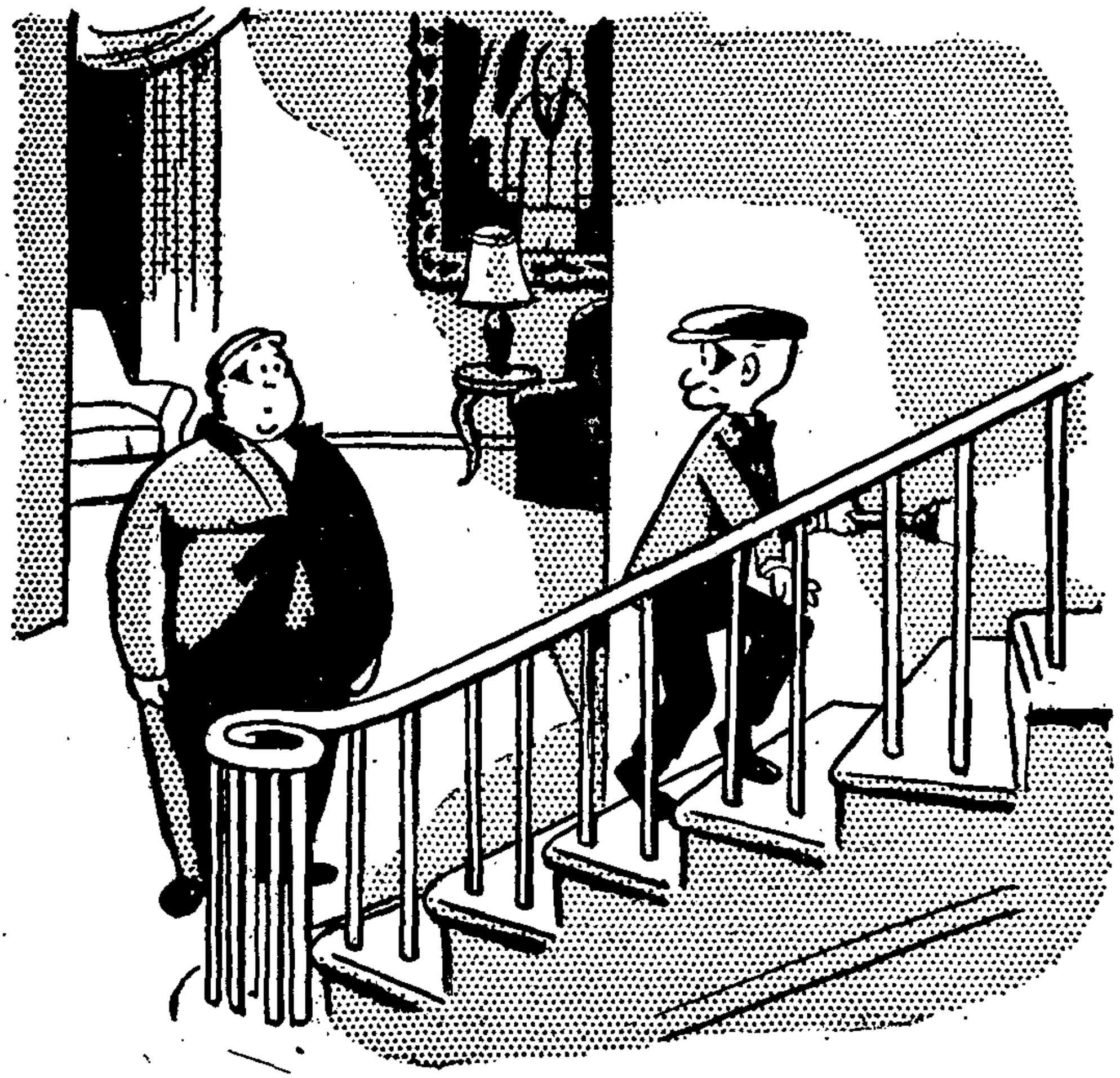
"Art is a hard mistress," said he. "I wonder if you'd do me a favour, Papa Vara? I've got to get home and dress, and take Gerda to a party, and I'm late. I was supposed to leave this with a man just round the corner—" He held up one of those attaché cases with a combination lock, like executives carry. "Do you mind if I leave it with you and have the man call for it?"

"So long as it isn't full of cocaine," I said.

He laughed, and said, "Only some papers and stuff. May I use your phone?" I told him to go ahead, and he quickly dialled a number and said, "Oh, hullo, Cheyney Wood here. Yes, I know I'm a little overdue, but I have it here. You know Vara's tailor's shop on Columbus? I'm leaving it with Mr. Vara. No, I must run now. . .

"Yes, yes, it'll be right here, I tell you! No. Yes. Good-bye."

Butch the Burglar



"Don't be nervous. Remember, people are probably just as afraid of burglars as you are of them."

He was sweating when he hung up. He said, "Somebody'll come and get my case, Papa Vara. It's . . . rather important, so you will be here, won't you? He'll be here within the hour."

I asked, "Do I give it to just anybody who comes in and asks for it?"

Gertie's husband said, "Well, no. It will be a person of the name of Lafferty." I could only nod. He shook my hand. "Bless you, Papa Vara!" he cried, and was gone.

I looked at the attaché case. It was a costly thing, of fine pigskin. The combination lock had three numbers. Now you know, I suppose, that a man never buys a pigskin attaché case for himself—a thing of such limited usefulness always comes to him as a gift. And the person who buys it, when the shopman asks what number she wants for the combination—I say "she" because most attaché cases are bought by women—almost invariably gives the birthday of the man she intends to give the case to.

Cheyney Wood's birthday, I happened to know, was the same as George Washington's, 22nd February. I turned the little wheels to 2-2-2. It worked. The case opened. *Just one little peep*, I thought.

Not such a little peep—a shriek! There lay the head of a kind of gorilla, a diseased gorilla with bloodshot eyes; and also a pair of scaly hands with curved claws, horribly realistic. I had to look twice before I realised that these objects were made of some kind of soft rubber. Then I noticed that they bore a stamp, *Lottalaffs. Sole Dist. Lullyfun Inc.* And there was an envelope, fastened with those little metal tags that bend. I opened it. It was crammed with money—used bills of small denomination!

I closed the case and scrambled the combination. It is a natural law that when things become just a little too queer your imagination switches itself off. You banish conjecture and start counting on your fingers. Or beads. You crave something familiar, something simple.

Now, to begin with I had the fact that Lafferty was a blackmailer. Poor Gertie was paying him a thousand dollars a month not to tell the world that she didn't write *Insights*. But Cheyney, also, was paying money to Lafferty. What for? And where was the significance of the rubber gorilla face and the claws?

William of Ockham says (more or less) that when two guesses lead to the same conclusion, the simpler is the true one.

So. *First guess*: Cheyney Wood lived a double life. His amiable, artistic, sensitive exterior masked a monster; a creature of the shadowy bushes, who crept out into Central Park in the

evening and frightened women and children. Lafferty had discovered his secret, and was extorting money from him by threat of exposure

Second guess: Cheyney Wood lived a double life. He—

—I snatched up the telephone directory, looked up Lullyfun Inc., and dialled their number. A girl answered. I said, "Please put me through to Mr. Cheyney Wood."

She replied, "I'm sorry, Mr. Wood has gone for the day. Will you leave a message?"

A sigh of pure relief almost lifted me from the floor. That was it—Gertie's Cheyney got his living selling Hallowe'en masks, Itchy-Koo powders, cushions that gave out disgusting noises when sat on, explosive cigars, stench bombs, nude figurines that lit up, and apparatus for squirting water in your eyes and puffing pepper into your nostrils. Worshipping Gerda Grühn as "an embodiment of pure Art"—or whatever it was—how could he admit to such a trade? So he had an art gallery. And Lafferty had discovered his secret and was extorting money from him by threat of exposure.

I had not quite planned my line of procedure when Lafferty came in, sloppy in flannels, and said, "Hi there! Mr. Wood left something to be picked up, I think. The name you know—Lafferty."

"Written any good poems lately?" I asked.

"Eh?" he said. Then, "Oh!"

I said, "Enough is enough, Lafferty. It's all up."

To my surprise he merely shrugged and said, "Damn silly game. Couldn't last, of course."

"I suppose you know what I'm talking about," I said. "You have been taking money, with menaces, from both Mr. and Mrs. Wood. Do you deny this?"

"It's a hell of a good story, if I had the wit to write it," he said, and began to laugh. "But obvious. One or the other was bound to get wise, and then—*Boingg!*"

He sat on the edge of the counter. "Here's your situation. Beautiful actress, talented performer but not very literate, signs her name to a book of verse by a publicity man literate but not very talented. Get it? Now, stink-bomb and sneeze-powder jockey, in love with actress, shyly approaches her through her poetry. And cut off my ear and call me Van Gogh, he opens an art gallery to win her respect! See? Publicity man knows 'em both, slightly. Both boy and girl have got to keep up appearances, but neither is anything like as well-to-do as the other thinks he is. Got me? Now all the time *he* knows that she never wrote that poetry, and she knows the real nature of

his extremely vulgar business—but neither thinks the other knows.

"It's not as complicated as it sounds, really. One day, things getting a bit tight, one of them blackmails the other for five thousand down and a thousand a month, as a price for keeping up the illusion. To get this money, the blackmailed party has to blackmail the blackmailer. And as it happens, they both use the same go-between—myself—paying a small monthly commission for his services. A curious state of affairs, eh?"

I heard myself asking, "How much did they pay you?"

"Gerda paid me a hundred, and Cheyney the same."

I opened the case again, took two hundred dollars out of the envelope and gave this sum to Lafferty. "This is the last you get," I said. "The game is over. You must never speak to either Mr. or Mrs. Wood again."

"Thanks," said he, sticking the bills in a trouser pocket. "I haven't any desire to. I'm not really cut out for talking tough."

I said, "You are sure that both Gerda and Cheyney came to you each of his own free will?"

"Quite certain. They both got the same idea, one after the other."

"Which of them started it?" I asked.

He looked at me closely—shrewdly, but not with ill nature—and then said, smiling, "Give me another hundred and I promise *not* to tell you!"

I blinked at him. For a moment I was too astonished to move. Then—the way you do in a dream—I opened the envelope in slow motion, and gave him another hundred dollars.

I said, "Oddly enough I rather like your company, so I am sorry to say, 'Go away and stay away.'"

And so he did, and that was all . . .

. . . Mr. Vara handed me my suit. "After all," he said angrily, "who hasn't a little something to conceal? And sometimes, between highly-strung people, a little bit of guilt can bring out a whole lot of tender feeling, can't it? They're in Rome now, they have two children, they're happy, aren't they? What I don't know, I can't talk about, can I?"

"All right," I said. "I didn't say anything. What did you do with the other seven hundred dollars, or however much it was?"

"I thought about it for weeks. I couldn't give it to one or the other without upsetting a very fine balance of things. So I decided to abolish it. I gave it to Mrs. Vara."

So saying, he waved me out of the shop. © Gerald Kersh 1963

DANCE of the STAG

by DAVID WALKER

IN the deep sky there was a drift of cirrus from the west, but here the evening was perfectly still. Hamish, tenth Baron Kintyle, walked up a young plantation. The Scots Pine and Hybrid Larch were doing well, apart from some roedeer damage. Nothing moved, and the only sound was a talking of grouse on the open moor above him. I must get after Farquhar again about those damned roedeer, he thought, and turned to walk downhill. It was then that the peaceful gabble of the grouse was broken by another sound—the hard clean crack of a rifle shot.

Weather conditions and the shape of the hills could play odd tricks with sound, but on this still evening he knew that the shot had been fired in the Lochan. Now echoes fell back from everywhere.

He ran. The reason he ran was that Farquhar the stalker would not be on the hill at six p.m. Thus, a shot meant a poacher, which Hamish Kintyle was rather expecting.

He jumped into the Land-Rover and was off. The distance to the Lochan was barely a mile across the hill, but there was no road that steep way. He had slow miles to travel on a bumpy track, first generally north, then west across a saddle into the head of the Lochan. As he drove he saw beasts cross the skyline ahead of him, a hundred, two hundred, moving east. They had been alarmed but were settling again, each big stag collecting his parcel of hinds, driving off the lesser male intruders. It was early autumn, the time of the rut.

He came to the head of the Lochan. Once there had been a hill loch to give it the name, but that was centuries ago. Now the

river plunged and gathered from its source to wind down this flat valley bottom.

Hamish left the car to spy the ground. His altitude here was just two thousand, and the Malloch march ran along the first tops opposite at two thousand five hundred. At the lower end of the glen the western cliffs were vertical—no beast could be taken out that way. At the upper end, and opposite him now, his new deer fence barred Kintyle from Malloch and vice versa. He could see the whole length of it across the slope, from cliffs below to cliffs at the head of the Lochan glen. He looked carefully through the telescope at his excellent unbroken fence which would pay for its

capital cost in a couple of years by doubled stalking rentals.

Thus, the Lochan was closed from the west. It could be approached from the south by road, from the east by man or pony, and from the north-east corner by a long road detour. He had seen no one as he came. Neither man nor beast moved now in the narrow glen.

I could have been wrong about that shot, he thought. Or it might have been Farquhar after all. Hamish drove from sunlight into the shadows of the valley, and crossed the wooden bridge. It had been rebuilt this spring, a solid job. "Everything shipshape," said Lord Kintyle. He had been an Air-Arm sailor until the death of his father five years ago. He did not fly now. He gave all his time, his brains, his energy to running Kintyle Estates at a profit. They had said that it could not be done, but he was doing it.

He was due to dine at eight with Elspeth McVicar and her mother. The McVicars were big shipping people, and nice, and quite recent adjuncts to County Crummock. The road was better here, and he put on speed. "Just ourselves," Elspeth said, meaning she and her mother and Hamish Kintyle. That was three, and one would say after dinner that she was a little tired, and would Hamish mind? Leaving two in the library by the fire; a whisky and soda, a lovely girl who wanted only to go his way. I will soon, he thought for the thousandth time. But not tonight. The age-old question will not be popped. Yet he saw with melancholy in his glen that if two people both truly love, the question becomes a formality, a seal upon a seal of truth already. Next week, he thought, as soon as Moira Malloch is gone, married, forgotten.

He passed the Bodach, the Old Man, one of the landmarks they used when stalking—a vertical stone or plinth of about a man's height. It was here that he had once done a stalk with Moira, a long crawl to kill her first stag, not on Malloch but on Kintyle. In those young days they were friends together.

Not far beyond the Bodach he came now on the gralloch of another stag. The intestines were still warm. He cast round for dragmarks, but there were none on the springy heather. He looked up the bed of the glen and to the high hills in the north. Nothing. He looked at the complex of hill and gully to the east. Nothing. He looked at the fall-away of the glen to the south. Nothing. He looked at the cliffs above him to the west, two hundred feet sheer to an overhang, unclimbable.

He drove on downhill for two more miles by the river that tumbled here sharply from the Highlands. He rattled across the cattle-grid. Farquhar heard that and came to his door.

"Farquhar," he said, "did you shoot a beast in the Lochan at six?"

"No, m'Lord," Farquhar said, surprised. "I was home from the hill at the back of five. I heard no shooting, and nobody passed here since." Nor would he have heard a shot in the Lochan. Sounds did not carry down to here unless the wind was out of the north.

Hamish told him where he had been, what he had heard, done, found. "You're sure nobody came down?"

"Certain, m'Lord." He was loyal, touchy, middle-aged, opinionated, a good man with no flexibility; and what use nowadays was a first-class stalker from the pony age who murdered any vehicle he drove? "Your Lordship will understand," said Farquhar, "that nothing gets over the bridge or the cattle-grid without me knowing." He continued deliberately, "A poacher with a pony could have crossed to the east while Your Lordship was driving round to the Lochan."

"A poacher with a pony is impossible," Hamish said. Or if not impossible—out of the question. The poacher came from Malloch, he thought, and did not say. Farquhar's son-in-law was the Malloch stalker, and Farquhar himself had let it be known that he did not approve of the new deer fence, much as it had improved his own stalking.

"A body must live with other folk," he remarked one day, apropos of nothing, to his laird.

Now Hamish was convinced that Moira Malloch had shot that stag. He had expected something of the sort since her attack on him at the Crummock Ball. And what typical arrogance to gralloch the beast there, flaunting the evidence. To climb the fence and into the Lochan and shoot the stag—all that was easy. But how to remove the heavy beast? It would be an impossible drag back up to the fence. There was no other way except down here—ruled out; or to the east away from home—ruled out.

"I want you to watch the Lochan tomorrow," he said. "Oh, and the roedeer are in that plantation again. I keep telling you that they must be shot."

"I killed three this past month, m'Lord," said Farquhar.

"Kill more, then," he said, and bade him good night, and drove on, thinking that he must have it out with Farquhar. He's a decent old stick-in-the-mud, Hamish thought. I'm wrong to keep on sniping at him.

He went home to change to be late for dinner with Elspeth and her mother, but they would not mind. They knew how hard he drove himself for the sake of Kintyle. But he thought about his disastrous meeting with Moira Malloch. "I pity anyone near

enough to you to be trampled on," she had said to him at the Ball the other night.

Elspeth had gone to leave her mink coat, and he to the men's cloakroom to inspect himself in a mirror, tidy the lace at neck and wrists, smooth out his sporran. He was turning from his handsome self when Sammy Cargill came in. "Hullo, Sammy," he said. "Just the chap I wanted to see." He gave Sammy a chance to underbid Feathered Foods for a large order of broiler mash. "... I thought you might do me a shilling better," he said.

Sammy first looked surprised, perhaps about this time and place for business; then pleased at the chance of Kintyle Estates' custom; then doubtful at a profit pared so thin. "May I telephone in the morning, Hamish?"

"Fine," he said. "By nine thirty, though—I need the stuff."

He went to write five dances in Elspeth's programme, and to do his duty by the other females of the party. He used to dance the night through to six a.m. at Highland Balls, but now they bored him. He would not have come this year except to please Elspeth, and because he felt it incumbent upon Lord Kintyle to show himself occasionally in society, frivolous as that society might be.

He had the first dance with Elspeth, whose blonde head came to the tip of his chin; and he was aware that people watched them, so eligible, so well matched—"When will they announce it?"

"... I think that's marvellous, Hamish," she said, looking up at him, the room filling with men in scarlet and black and green, dark kilts and bright, and the Highland girls with tartan sashes. He had just been telling her that he had got far better rentals for his spring salmon fishing next year. "You're working wonders for Kintyle," she said, and she was the heiress of Dalruddie, his neighbour to the east. Yes, he was working wonders, and the way to work wonders was to work, not shoot three or four days a week like some others.

Now he saw the daughter of his western neighbour. He met Moira Malloch's eyes across the floor, but her eyes moved from him. She laughed with her partner, a man in tails, like a drably elegant blackbird among the peacocks. He would be the fiancé, Dick Buckeridge by name, from London. Hamish had not seen Moira since she went abroad two years ago, and their last meeting had been acrimonious. It was a matter of bulldozing a salmon pool to improve the lies for both parties—left bank, right bank—and Colonel Malloch had agreed. But by chance, not intention, the only fish caught afterwards were from Kintyle.

I suppose I ought to say my piece, he thought, so he drank a

glass of champagne for encouragement, and went across to offer congratulations to the lucky man, and to wish happiness to Moira Buckeridge-to-be.

"Good evening, Moira," he said.

"Oh, hullo," she said. She introduced them. Hamish said his piece, and after that silence, but not the silence of many old days on the hill together. I must make an effort, he thought. "Could you dance number three?" he said. "*The Dashing White Sergeant*. Or five, an eightsome?"

"Sorry," she said, glancing at her programme, and then she gave that to Buckeridge to hold while she drew on her long white gloves, first the right one, and then the left to cover her ring. "How I loathe these things," she said, presumably about the gloves. "Thank you, darling," she said, and took the folded card from her bridegroom of next week, and watched the pencil swing, small pendulum on a silky thread. Hamish said a few nothings to Dick Buckeridge, who seemed an agreeable fellow, out to be pleasant to people in this savage land, including a local lord, towards whom Moira was plainly hostile.

"Could you manage one later on?" he asked doggedly. He almost said "for auld lang syne" or something equally banal.

Moira Malloch opened her lips, closed them, flipped her programme up to her hand. "Thirteen then, if you like," she said.

Hamish left them, pausing beyond a doric column to write Malloch against unlucky number thirteen, a Viennese Waltz, and to hear: "He's become the biggest money-crazy bore in Scotland—profits for Kintyle and bankruptcy for everyone else."

Hamish knew that some people thought him rather mad, and even resented what he tried to do. But what were the facts? They were that in the five years since inheriting he had trebled the revenues of Kintyle. Some good luck? Certainly, but luck is what you make yourself. And the employees of his thirty thousand acres—twenty thousand hill, five thousand forest, five thousand arable—had *their* lot improved? Yes, vastly, once he had winnowed the feudal chaff. It was a new world these days—and unlike the fuddy-duddies, he was moving with it. He was making it. Decadent aristocracy?—not he. Was it better that another great estate should crumble from rack to ruin to be broken up? Or was it better to go ahead to build for these days? Hamish Kintyle was in no doubt. The fishing, stalking, grouse and pheasants, Kintyle Farm Products, Kintyle Timber, Kintyle Poultry, and now his new subsidiary, Kintyle Klapboard—and in all this not a single human being had been harmed. Well, it was true that the deer fence on the Malloch line had not been a

help to the Malloch stalking. But whose deer were they? And who had built the first deer fence? The Mallochs, a hundred years ago. "Oh, dammit," he said aloud, as the pipers played warning bars for an eightsome.

He was dancing the reel with Elspeth. If she noticed his gloom, she made no comment, always her kind self, thinking of him. I must make a good job of proposing, he thought. But when? Not tonight. But the thought of the two estates as one cohesive enterprise . . .

"I have a lot on tomorrow," he said later at supper. "So I think I'll slide out early, say about number fourteen."

"Oh, can't we stay?"

"Why don't you?" he said. "The others could drive you home."

"No," she said, "not if you want to take me." Elspeth looked at him, completely his in love to be with him; but he must get to bed by two. Time we were married, he thought. He put his hand on her knee below the table. She shivered once, and laid her hand on his . . .

"This is our one, I think," he said to Moira. "Shall we dance, or sit it out?"

"Dance, I suppose," she said. *Tales of the Vienna Woods*, that hackneyed, undying tune, and how well she danced, how flawless her balance and rhythm, which even he could tell, how cool a professional dancer in his arms away from him. Moira had trained five years to be a ballet dancer, and was brilliantly gifted, but, as everyone expected, she grew too tall. She had set her heart on it, and no persuasion could break the wilful artist's will until the will broke itself against feet and inches. That was when she began to change, he thought.

"Did you enjoy your two years in Toronto?" he asked, becoming giddy, so he reversed her.

"You waltz like you do everything," she said. "You bulldoze. I didn't enjoy teaching ballet much, because I only had one pupil with the glimmerings of real talent. But Toronto was fun." For the first time now, Moira looked at him, her eyes nearly level with his. "I met Dickie there," she said.

"He seems a very nice chap," said Hamish Kintyle, trying not to bulldoze.

"He not only seems," she said as the music stopped; and then other couples clapped for more. Moira smiled to herself. There was a gentleness about her too. "Dickie is as kind and sweet as anyone could be," she said.

And no match for you, he thought. "I wish you would bring him over to Kintyle," he said, and went on, laboured, jocular,

so unlike himself: "then I could kill two birds with my wedding present." They were dancing again.

"Dickie flies south tomorrow," she said, "and no wedding present, thank you very much." Her back drew away against his hand, and her gloved hands stiffened. "How dare you!" she said. Sometimes her eyes were brown, sometimes almost black, as now.

"Why, Moira? We used to have wonderful times together." At last he had said something that sounded true, unpompous.

"Yes," she said. "You were nice in those days—spoilt even then, but always wild and gay and fun to be with, to fish and pick wildflowers and stalk, and . . ."

But his mind went away from this crowded place, from the cool melody of her voice in the waltzing jangle. For a few seconds he was far from here, ten years ago, when he took his hand from the throat of the deer to touch her left cheek, her right cheek, her brow, her chin. "That's you blooded," he said, "and you can't wash it off till after supper."

She laughed. She was fourteen then, a long-legged creature of the hill. She danced a dance in her heavy shoes, on the grass, on the heather, alone with Hamish and her first dead stag. And so to a clap of hands, a surge, a run, a moment to stand, a stiffening, a crumple, and the antlers tossed once in the time of dying, and the eyes glazed open into death. She stood again, laughing. "The dance of the stag. We're savages, Hamie. Just a pair of savages is what we are."

She had been a child to him, the younger by three years, his merry slave, and often the leader. But she said to him now: "Just a pair," lightly, unwittingly. They saw one another anew. Moira's own blood rose to her blooded cheeks, so that was an end and a beginning.

But he was back, and she was saying: ". . . You must have gone mad. How could you do such a thing to my father?"

"There was a deer fence there in our great-grandfathers' time. Who put it up? You did. Who took it down? You did, after one winter. And why? Because the snow drifted so badly over the fence that all the deer crossed over to where they belonged, so your fence worked the other way." Hamish smiled. That old story was quite amusing.

"True," she said, "but a hundred years ago Malloch was bigger than Kintyle. We had twenty-five thousand acres of hill. Now we have just seven, with the Forestry Commission fence to the west, and all our beasts trapped over in Kintyle."

"My fence will drift," he said. "They can cross in a bad winter if they want to. But they won't, because their wintering

grounds are in Kintyle. They spend ten months of every year on my ground. All I have done is keep them at home." He might have said that it was not his fault that Malloch had been sold off piecemeal for spendthrift debt. The first encore ended, and he half expected that she would leave him; but she went on talking with quiet anger until they were dancing again, nightmare dance that he had asked for.

"Until this year," she said, "we still had the best small deer forest in the county. You know what happened, don't you? Peyton, our tenant, got three poor beasts in a month of stalking; so he hasn't renewed his lease, and he won't unless that fence comes down."

Hamish said nothing, dancing on to the *Blue Danube*, best known of Viennese waltzes. He had made up his mind and nothing would change it, not even the pleading of Moira Malloch —something new that she should plead. "It's not for me," she said. "I'm going away, and Dickie and I could never afford to keep up Malloch. But my father—"

"Your father hasn't said a word to me," he said. "Not that I could agree."

"Daddy never asks favours. And all he said to me when I came home was that he hoped one day you might learn that the best profits are earned, not taken from people. I didn't want to dance with you or talk to you or see you, and I would rather die than ask you a favour for myself, but—"

"Any favour would surely be too much to ask from the biggest money-crazy bore in Scotland," said Hamish Kintyle.

"Yes, too much to ask," Moira said. Then she, the impeccable dancer, lost rhythm, danced a step or two more, stopped and took her hands away while the *Blue Danube* still had people spinning. "I pity anyone near enough to you to be trampled on," she said loudly enough for people to hear, if anyone listened, or people heard. "Poor Elspeth," she said more quietly now. "Poor everyone, and most of all: poor you." She looked at him with another thought, some live and mocking purpose: "Good stalking, then, Kintyle!"

She turned. He watched her go. She was beautiful in body and in movement. He wanted to hurt her, and she was gone.

It was two days after the Crummock Ball that the stag had been shot. On the third day Farquhar watched the Lochan, but nothing happened, no clue to the mystery crime. On the fourth day he watched again.

That afternoon Hamish had to drive a hundred miles to Inverness for a conference about his latest venture—Kintyle

Klapboard, made from bonded wood particles. Once he had organised the supply of waste forest products, this was going to be a big thing, really big.

He left the Castle at three, and drove in the car to the town of Kintyle, where he had one or two things to do en route. He chanced to see outside the ironmonger's shop a jeep which aroused his interested attention. One more glance at it was enough, and he went into the shop where Duncan Innes the Malloch stalker happened to be buying ammunition for a .275. He was about to hand over the rifle permit for the entry to be made, but saw Kintyle and drew it back. "After you, m'Lord," he said, touching his deerstalker's hat. He was a big fellow, a dead-panned Jock, politeness itself to the arch-enemy.

The arch-enemy, despite some faults, was not the sort of overbearing lord or laird who did not wait his turn in queues. Nor was he quite such a bulldozing halfwit as some people might imagine. "Thank you, Innes," he said. "I'm just off to Inverness, and late already, so perhaps . . ." He bought his own twelve-bore cartridges, said good afternoon, and left, but not for Inverness. He drove home fast, changed into an old kilt, switched to the Land-Rover, stopped at the estate office to pick up two letters he had dictated after lunch, and told his factor to telephone Inverness to postpone the conference. Oddly enough, the money-crazy bore did not care one damn at the moment about his newest and most ambitious venture.

He drove past Farquhar's cottage and changed down for the climb into the Lochan. Of all the hills, the glens, the lowland valleys that made Kintyle, he loved this place the best, a small world of its own. Here, battles had been fought against marauders from the north. Here, the ghosts of men were said to walk. Here, the wee people danced in the moon. Strangers might fear the Lochan. But the lonely glen below the blue-black hills was home to Hamish, tenth Baron Kintyle, go-getter, pulling the Highlands up by its kilt-straps, a Highlander none the less.

His feelings and intentions this afternoon were not romantic. He left the car, and climbed to Farquhar's eyrie. "Seen anything?" he said.

"Nothing, m'Lord. With this wind, there's nobody could stalk a beast except he came into the Lochan from the south." *He*, Farquhar said.

"I know," said Hamish. He had told Farquhar nothing of his suspicions, now a virtual certainty—how obvious the incredible could turn out to be. "It looks like a waste of time today," he said. "So I'll relieve you here a while until I start for Inverness. There are two important letters in the Land-Rover . . . Leave my

car at your house, and take your own. I'll walk down from here." Thus he sent Farquhar on two errands, and the first of those would take him past Malloch where his daughter lived. The Laird gone to Inverness, the stalker away on the laird's urgent business. He had got rid of old Farquhar quite cleverly.

Not quite so cleverly perhaps. "M'Lord," he said, "I've been here these twenty-six years past, and my dad before me, and there's no other home I could call my own . . ." Farquhar cleared his throat.

"Go on, Farquhar." What was it? A raise? But he had had one lately.

"As I said to his Lordship once afore: a body must live with other folk." He stared up and across the Lochan at the fence, the posts still yellowish and new. "I'm to give in my notice, Your Lordship," he said. He turned for some comment, acceptance, acknowledgment; but receiving none, he touched his cap and went, still strong of leg, sure-footed on the hill.

Hamish watched him to the car, which he turned with a distant crash of gears. One foot in the other camp, thought Hamish. I'll be better off without him. Get some young chap . . . And yet he would miss Farquhar, the mentor of his youth.

Now Hamish Kintyle had the glen to himself. He was alone, alone here now, always alone in some degree. And he questioned himself, as reasonable men who are alone must do. Could he be wrong? Could they all be right? The increasing reserve of his fellow lairds . . . the things that spitfire Moira had said to him the other night—were they true? Nonsense! He knew where he was going, and would go there honourably, and one day the world would thank him. In the meanwhile, let them hate his guts. It was even quite enjoyable to feel that one's guts were hated . . .

Was the wind changing? It had been from the north, and two lots of beasts were up that end. But now he felt a coolness behind his neck—from the east. Would it steady to that? Or was it a whim of the wind, ever fickle in narrow places?

It was hard to tell from his pile of rocks on a steep hillside. He watched the deer at the head of the Lochan. Sure enough, they were beginning to feed this way—one big stag with his harem and hangers-on, and another stag with a smaller parcel of hinds.

Yes, the wind was veering fast. It often changed in the afternoons, and it had changed now to make a poaching descent into the Lochan possible from Malloch. He watched the fence, the posts not yet weathered to blend with the hill. And he thought to himself, admitted privately, that his fine new fence did somehow take from the freedom, the beauty of this place. And what could beauty be but freedom?

He turned from that to watch the cliffs to the west of him, but the sun was in his eyes. The evening grew fine with the veering wind, clouds broken now, and it was cold, and the deer were on the move for shelter.

Nothing else moved until two dark grouse and a white-flecked ptarmigan flew high and fast across the Lochan, perhaps fifteen hundred feet above the river. Such unusual behaviour could mean only one thing. In a moment an eagle flew overhead, now sailing, now beating its wings, no fences for eagles.

He followed the eagle's north-westerly course until the great bird dwindled into nothing against dark hills. But the free-flying eagle, gone now, gone miles away, led his eyes to two small figures. They might have been deer as they moved down to the fence. He did not use his telescope because of the sun, which could give his presence away by reflection. But deer cannot scale high fences.

They came on down, checked suddenly, continued, and the wind was blowing from the south, dead right for an approach down the Lochan. The big stag roared, following his hinds. He turned to lock antlers with a rival, put him to flight, and roared again, head tilted back. Then he trotted into the corrie below the cliffs. The stag and his hinds were in shelter, and the stag was in danger now.

The sun had dropped behind the hills, which enabled Hamish to use his glass. First, he searched the face of the cliff until he found what he expected. Then he had a quick spy at the stag, somewhat lower down. It was a Royal, a twelve-pointer, with magnificent wide-curving antlers. He and Farquhar knew that beast, of course. It bore the promise of so good, indeed great, a head, that Farquhar had taken care to ensure that it would not be shot before its prime. Now, in its prime, it still survived.

But now Moira Malloch and Duncan Innes were moving fast into position for a stalk that would hand the stag to her on a platter—a long shot, two hundred yards or more. Among the young lady's skills or attributes was deadly marksmanship with a rifle. Hamish Kintyle had done much of the teaching when they were friends. Quite a few people, given time to rest and take deliberate aim, were deadly. But nobody, not excluding Hamish himself, could rival Miss Malloch when time was short.

She led the way through broken ground below the cliffs, above the flat riverbed. Hamish kept her in the glass. Black hair below a deerstalker's hat, a high-necked green sweater, a small satchel such as skiers carry, strapped at the waist, a kilt of Hunting Malloch—all blended into the colours of the hill. Only her face—alert, intent—stood out clearly, the expression a

peculiarly ruthless pleasure, Moira Malloch on the hunt. She stopped, and pointed a finger at her hidden quarry, pointed correctly, as Hamish could see. Duncan Innes nodded, undid the strap of the rifle cover. She began the stalk, and from now on Duncan copied her movements precisely. He was not here to take Miss Moira up to Lord Kintyle's best stag, but only to follow, faithful weapon-bearer.

There were several things that Kintyle could do. He could put a shot across her bows, at safe distance, say twenty yards smack into a rock. That would startle the kilted pants off Moira Malloch, against whom he had a flaming grudge. It would also save his stag. Perhaps not, for the deer must break from the corrie, and she, boats burnt, in flagrante delicto, more than likely would take a galloping shot, which she would not miss.

Or he could let his beast be killed in order to catch her red-handed. To have a cast-iron case to take to court, that was just what he had to do.

He watched her, first stooping, then on hands and knees, then wriggling on her stomach, supple, oddly graceful. She stopped, put her right hand back without turning her head, and the rifle was placed in it. Then she crawled a last few yards through an ooze of black peat to a hummock. Duncan lay where he had taken the rifle from its cover. An old hind was suspicious. Now suddenly every head turned to listen, to watch, but no scent had reached them. The stag was broadside. Hamish saw it surge long before he heard the shot. "Through the heart," he said. He watched the stag gallop to death across the corrie.

The other deer broke down this way, across the river and up past Hamish, hoofs rattling the scree in desperate flight. He waited, the evidence not quite complete. He watched Moira laugh once, sheer exultance, and then she was staring down the glen as Duncan Innes bled the stag, and gralloched it swiftly, drew out the intestines, wiped his knife and his bloody arm, put on his jacket, tied a cord round the forelegs and started to drag while Moira grasped one antler to take the weight of the head. They dragged the dead stag uphill to the base of the cliff, a tremendous short effort. They scanned the glen once, saw nothing. They walked fast back north, the way they had come; climbed the fence, and were out of sight. It was some arrogance that they did not bother to run.

Now Hamish could move, his case complete. He slid down the scree, into heather, through peat-hags, grass, swampy reeds to the bridge. It was only as he climbed that he realised his foolishness —in his determination to have all the facts of Moira Malloch's crime, he had let the criminal escape him. But the body of the

stag lay at the cliff—he had that, at least. The rest, Moira would confess with gusto in court. The other thing that Hamish Kintyle had failed to consider was that Moira Malloch's last highland fling before marriage, suburbia, prams, and so on was going to be the biggest best local joke in history, and at whose expense? Running the final steep stretch to the cliff, he could hear, he could hear, he could hear wild mirth ring in every house, cottage, castle, bothy in the county.

He bent to free the canvas sling from the dead stag's ruffed neck; but the sling tightened, the head began to rise. He clung to the antlers, put all his weight to hold the stag down. No good. Inexorably, the body rose at the end of a thin steel cable.

There was a quick choice to be made—let the stag, the last remaining evidence, go—or ride up with it, retrieve the situation, once again catch Malloch redhanded. It was a grave risk—his thirteen stone added to the eighteen or twenty of the stag, too much weight for the cable—or just as likely, she would see him rise with the stag and let the winch run out, smashed below the cliffs, wouldn't put it past her. He looked up and saw no face peering over far above him. He saw what seemed like the end of a crane or girder. All this he saw, considered, decided in an instant.

The stag rode the cable or hawser, and Hamish the stag. The base of the antlers made good handlebars, and he gripped the wide back with his knees. These contortions caused a slow and horrible spin. He shut his eyes, and was reminded of another time when he had been plucked in rather this fashion by helicopter from his aircraft in the drink, in the Atlantic Ocean. But that time had been a lovely feeling and relief. This time all that made it bearable was the prospect of what he would say and do if he ever reached the top alive.

The ascent was slow, not quite interminable, and Hamish was much afraid, many things passing by him in kaleidoscope. Profits! "Best profits are earned, not taken from people." What were profits? What was that chestnut about not being able to take it with you? Yet true. Money-crazy bore, he thought.

He now heard the jeep engine and opened his eyes as he and his dead charger completed a spin to face the cliff; but the top of the cliff was at eye level. "O.K., Duncan, you can back up now." And she laughed and said, "That'll teach the stinker to put up deer fences."

The next movement was a topple to the horizontal, and Hamish Kintyle was again in safety, meeting the wide black eyes of Moira Malloch. The gleeful smile of the master or mistress poacher faded from her face, to be replaced by openmouthed horror. All the roses of sun and wind left her cheeks. She

regarded him like some strange monster from the depths, but said, " Och, Hamish! You might have been killed."

He dismounted, rose, and advanced upon her. She was no small girl, but he said to her, " You little devil, I caught you out."

And then he laughed, and Moira began to laugh, her colour returning. It was a long time since they had laughed together. Soon they stopped.

A cough from Duncan Innes. " Time's wearing on, Miss Moira. Would I load up the beast? What would Miss Moira's wishes be? "

" You'd better ask Hamish," she said, not taking her black Scottish eyes off Hamish Kintyle.

Hamish looked at the front-mounted winch (used in forestry also), at the girder bolted to chassis members, a pulley at the end, ingenious device to hold the load clear of the cliff-top. " Well, I'll be damned," he said, and issued no instructions.

" If His Lordship would help me heft the beast, then mebbe I would after my supper be driving down to deliver His Lordship's stag at Kintyle, and mebbe His Lordship and Miss Moira would be after walking down together in the gloaming."

" Right, Duncan." He helped him load the stag into the jeep, while that sly fellow hummed a tune about she was shy and so was I, and we were baith the same, and then we got better better on the journey coming hame.

" Good night then, Miss Moira," said Duncan. " Good night, m'Lord." He smiled upon Moira with some love, and upon the arch-enemy with some kindness. " What for is a deer fence? " he inquired, grinning broadly. The jeep bumped off across the moor.

" The Dance of the Stag," said Hamish Kintyle. " Do you remember? "

" I remember," she said. " Do you think I ever could forget a single thing I ever did with you? "

" Dance it, then! " he said.

So Moira danced the Dance of the Stag again, such a blessing of beauty and freedom for him; yet the dance was the death of a noble quarry. " We're savages, Hamie," she said now to him, still lying on the ground, and her clothes were blackened and soaked with peat. " Just a pair of savages is what we are."

" Just a pair, my darling," he said, beside her. " Why are you crying? " he asked, but he knew.

" The loving and laughter," Moira said. " The hurting and killing, and life is so cruel. Poor Elspeth and Dickie! "

" Yes, I know," he said, and he kissed his true love. He would cause pain; yet now his heart grew humble. © David Walker 1963

PROBE SIX-FIVE

After this a journey to the stars would be a milk run

BY L. P. DAVIES

BUTTENY had the floor.

The eggheads, the back-room types had had their say, and the newspaper boys had listened and made notes and waited.

Now Butteny was there behind the battery of microphones, and this was the red meat of the thing. This was where it came alive. You could feel the difference in the room.

Dramatic, Butteny; and photogenic. Tall, broad, thick black hair, and a face made of solid crags. You know the type. Pick up any SF magazine from any news-stand and there he is, thrusting his chin at you from the cover.

I folded my arms and waited like the rest of them.

"The eve of the sixty-fifth venture into space." Just like that; no preliminaries. Butteny all over. "Nothing, you may say, to get excited about. Nothing of any great importance. The first few—yes. The days of the pioneers. But after that—" he shrugged them off with a grand gesture—"milk runs."

And they laughed at that. Well, they were right; space probes had become nothing more than milk runs. They understood and they chuckled and they waited with pens poised. They knew what was to come, for they had already been told. But they waited for him to tell them all over again, this time in a language that they and their readers could understand.

Butteny waved the milk runs of the past aside. They weren't worth mention. Not in the same breath as Probe Six-five.

"Before man could set foot in space he had a barrier to break," he told them. "Before he can reach for the stars there is a second barrier to smash."

He spoke for a while about our capsule, Ventura VI. He was enjoying every second of it. He didn't even bother to look in my direction. But then he was the commander; I was the guy who went along for the ride.

His fingers thrust at the ceiling. "A thousand miles up." He spread his arms. "A quarter of a million miles a second." He was laying it on thick. One eight six treble o plus was the

speed we were after. The speed of light. The critical speed; the threshold to the stars.

And that was something else they knew all about. I waited for them to resurrect the corny gag.

"Taken out a life assurance policy?" they called out.

There was laughter at that, but the sound died quickly; too quickly. It had been a joke, once. But not now, not when you are on the verge of finding out for certain just what does happen when you travel faster than light.

I tried not to think about that. I missed the next bit of Butteny's speech. When I came back he was talking about relativity.

"They have it all worked out," he was telling them. "Time and mass are relative. Space curves back on itself. Beyond the critical speed the laws that govern the universe cease to apply. Time, mass, shape, everything becomes distorted.

"I don't understand their jargon," he told his audience. "Do you?" And he cut into their laughter, "So I'm going to find out for myself. I want to know just what will happen up there. Perhaps they are right; perhaps two minutes up there will be the same as two years down here."

And he made "down here" sound like something the cat had brought in. But then, of course, he thought of himself as the last of the pioneers of space. After this even a journey to the stars would be a milk run.

Maybe he was right.

The eggheads stirred restlessly and looked at each other, raising their shoulders. They didn't like this any more than I did. But for different reasons. They didn't like science being cut to the level of a pulp magazine. Me—I was dead scared.

I thought about the first two trips I had made with him in the Ventura VI and I missed the next part of his speech again. Now he was playing down the earlier hazards, boosting up the new one.

"Meteorites, radiation, sickness." He shrugged them off. "A fracture of the casing can be repaired; suits are a complete protection against radiation; space sickness is a discomfort easily overcome. But what of the unknown perils of crossing this previously forbidden frontier?"

God, I thought, how much more of it?

I didn't listen to the rest of it. The cameras and the lights moved in. They took pictures of us standing together, arms about each other's shoulders. They took a lot more of Butteny standing alone, arms folded, gazing sternly into the future.

When it was over we walked back to quarters together. He held out his hand, the palm flat. "I had them there," he gloated.

"Did you see? And tomorrow, when it is done—" He curled his fingers. "Tomorrow, the world."

Ventura VI blasted off at o-eight hundred the next morning. I didn't feel so good. I wondered how 'Butteny was feeling. His face never showed emotion when he was at the control panel of a capsule.

The viewing-screen showed the swinging curvature of the globe. Then it darkened and was filled with slow-moving stars. We made three orbits. The last one took us out to one thousand miles. In Ventura's tail were six booster rockets. The push in the back that would take us over the new threshold. Into something that even the scientists weren't sure about. Into a no-existence where time and mass would cease to have significance.

Butteny's finger was the one that would push the button. That went without saying. And he made quite a thing of it. He started the build-up while we were still on the second orbit. It reached climax at the completion of the third.

"On four," he told the mike and the waiting, listening world. "Now; now; now—" He turned, finger poised, to grin at me. I watched the red mark on the speed indicator dial. The needle stood steady at fifty thousand per second, which was the best we could do until he pushed that damned button.

"So now we find out," he said. "Now," and stubbed, and the needle shot round the red, and my chin tried to reach my backbone. And in the viewing-screen the stars flicked out and space became grey and empty.

You could tell that something had happened. You could feel the difference. But there was nothing to show save the swirling grey nothingness on the screen.

Then the meteorites struck. We got two of them together. I heard the crackle and hiss of sound and saw the two holes in the metal wall. One hole was smallish, about half an inch across, and the rock fragment that had come through it crunched under my foot as I dived for the repair kit.

The larger hole was some two inches in diameter, and the meteorite that had caused it fell, impetus spent, on the floor and went rolling until it stopped by Butteny's chair.

I plugged the gaps and turned round. Butteny had the larger meteorite in his hand and was staring at it. It was steaming a little, but not too hot for him to hold in his gloved hand. All the water had boiled off it during its friction passage through the wall. But the contours, the shapings on it, were clear enough.

He had said that today he would hold the world in his palm.

How right he had been.

© L. P. Davies 1963

While the Sun shines

When June is come, then all the day
I'll sit with my love in the scented hay
And watch the sun-hot palace high
That the white clouds build in the breezy sky.

ROBERT BRIDGES

Now straightening from the flowery hay
Down the still light the mowers look;
Or turn, because their dreaming shook
And they waked half to other days,
When left alone in yellow stubble,
The rusty-coated mare would graze.
Yet thick the lazy dreams are born;
Another thought can come to mind,
But like the shivering of the wind,
Morning and evening in the corn.

LEONIE ADAMS, *Country Summer*

The best mowers mowed away in a line where the grass was still uncut, their scythes roaring in the strong sunlight. The women raked the dry hay together in long strips with wooden rakes, and the two boys with pitchforks followed up on either side of the strip, turning the hay inwards, so that it lay well for picking up. Then the great carts followed, rumbling with their spiked wooden wheels, drawn by horses or slow white oxen. One man stood on top of the cart to receive the hay and direct operations, while one man walked on either side picking up what the boys had prepared and throwing it to him with a fork. The cart was led down the lane between two lines of hay and was loaded in strict rotation from the front poles to the back . . .

When the wagon was loaded it was drawn to Sir Ector's rick and pitched to him. Sir Ector scrambled about on top, getting in the way of his assistants, who did the real work, and stamping

and perspiring and scratching about with his fork and trying to make the rick grow straight and shouting that it would all fall down as soon as the west winds came . . .

The hay was an element to them, like sea or air, in which they bathed and plunged themselves and which they even breathed in. The seeds and small scraps stuck in their hair, their mouths, their nostrils, and worked, tickling, inside their clothes. They did not wear many clothes and the shadows between their sliding muscles were blue on the nut-brown skins.

T. H. WHITE, *The Sword in the Stone*

Through all the pleasant meadow-side
The grass grew shoulder-high
Till shining scythes went far and wide
And cut it down to dry.

Those green and sweetly smelling crops
They led in wagons home;
And they piled them here in mountain tops
For mountaineers to roam.

Oh what a joy to clamber there,
Oh, what a place to play,
With the sweet, the dim, the dusty air,
The happy hills of hay!

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, *The Hayloft*

New-mown Nostalgia

"Summer evenings in the country—stained-glass window—light going out, and you and she jamming your heads together over one hymnbook," said Mottram.

"Yes, and a fat old cockchafer hitting you in the eye when you walked home. Smell of hay, and a moon as big as a bandbox sitting on the top of a haycock; bats—roses—milk and midges," said Lowndes. RUDYARD KIPLING, *At the End of the Passage*

Only the scent of woodbine and hay new-mown
Travelled the road. In the field sloping down
Park-like to where its willows showed the brook,
Haymakers rested. The tosser lay forsook
Out in the sun; and the long wagon stood
Without its team, it seemed it never would
Move from the shadow of that single yew.
The team, as still, until their task was due,
Beside the labourers enjoyed the shade . . .

EDWARD THOMAS, *Haymaking*

Antic Hay

Miriam had one beautiful evening with him in the hay. He had been on the horse-rake, and, having finished, came to help her put the hay in cocks . . . And then, the next day, Clara came. They were to have tea in the hayfield. Miriam watched the evening drawing to gold and shadow. And all the time Paul was sporting with Clara. He made higher and higher heaps of hay that they were jumping over. Miriam did not care for the game, and stood aside. Edgar and Geoffrey and Maurice and Clara and Paul jumped. Paul won, because he was light. Clara's blood was roused. She could run like an Amazon. Paul loved the determined way she rushed at the haycock and leapt, landing on the other side, her breasts shaken, her thick hair undone.

"You touched!" he cried. "You touched!"

"No!" she flashed, turning to Edgar. "I didn't touch, did I? Wasn't I clear?"

"I couldn't say," laughed Edgar.

"I did not touch!" she cried.

"As plain as anything," said Paul.

"Box his ears for me!" she cried to Edgar.

D. H. LAWRENCE, *Sons and Lovers*

There was never a sound beside the wood but one,
And that was my long scythe whispering to the ground.
What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound—
And that was why it whispered and did not speak.
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:
Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak
To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.
The fact is the sweetest dream that labour knows.
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

ROBERT FROST, *Mowing*

Hay Snack!

"Another sandwich!" said the King.

"There's nothing left but hay, now," the messenger said.

"Hay, then," the King murmured in a faint whisper.

"There's nothing like eating hay when you're faint," he remarked to her as he munched away.

LEWIS CARROLL, *Through the Looking-Glass*

GIRL ON THE ROOF

Jim was a born explorer

BY STEWART FARRAR

MRS. MACKENZIE didn't ask Jim for any help about the house very often. She was a good landlady—fed him well, and was motherly over little things like knowing his birthday; but she had firm ideas about a lodger's right not to be bothered.

Sometimes, on his day off, he'd suggest cleaning the silver for her, or brushing the stair-carpet or something. Her answer was always the same.

"Nice of you, dear—but I can manage."

And she did manage the high old terraced house, very efficiently. What she called the "man-sized jobs," involving carpentry or electric wiring, she'd save up for when her sailor husband was ashore; everything else she did herself.

But on that particular Thursday afternoon, she admitted defeat and knocked on Jim's door.

"Since you're at home, dear—do you know anything about plumbing?"

"A bit, Mrs. Mac. What's the trouble?"

"I'm not getting any water. I'll send for a man, but would you have a look first? Just in case I've done something silly?"

Jim said he was sure she hadn't, and went with her to the kitchen. She was right; no cold water. The hot was still running, but she'd had the sense not to draw on it.

"Must be the cold tank," he told her.

And that's how Jim came to find himself in the roof. The trapdoor was above the landing outside his own room, with a ladder beside it, so he pocketed a torch and climbed up.

A torch wasn't necessary, he found. A dusty two-by-two skylight in the slope beside the tank gave him all the light he needed.

It was as he'd expected. The ancient ball-cock had stuck, so the tank was empty. Jim cleaned the valve till it was working freely, and left the tank to fill itself.

Mrs. Mackenzie was very grateful, and that would have been that; only Jim was a born explorer. Or, as his more critical

friends put it, incurably nosy. And that skylight intrigued him.

Ten minutes later he was up in the roof again. The skylight obviously hadn't been opened for years, and if it hadn't been a bright summer day outside, not much sun would have struggled through the tea-coloured dirt on the glass. But when Jim released the catch, it opened without too much difficulty. He put his head out.

The architecture was typical of a Victorian terrace; a straight parapet in front, hiding the up-and-down slopes of grey tiles.

Jim blinked in the glare, and looked round. Then he blinked again.

A very pretty girl, in a royal blue swimsuit, lay ten feet from his eyes, fast asleep in the sun.

She was stretched out on an inflated rubber mattress, on the yard or so of flat roof between this slope and the next; and she had obviously come from the neighbouring house, because the opposite skylight was open.

For a minute or two, Jim stayed there, unashamedly studying her. She was, he could see, not very tall, and her curves were a little fuller than classical. Her skin was almost as brown as her hair, as though she had spent many hours in this private sun-trap.

Jim found her perfect. He was a very direct young man, so he pulled himself through the skylight, deliberately making enough noise to wake her.

The girl sat up hastily, pulling her shoulder-straps into place with a quick but graceful movement.

"Hullo," Jim said. "Sorry to disturb you."

"Who are you?"

"My name's Jim Leigh. I live down there —" pointing back the way he'd come.

"Oh."

They looked at each other in silence. In her eyes, Jim saw caution give place to a provisional friendliness.

"My name's Frances," she said at last. "Like a cigarette?"

That was how it started, Jim Leigh's strange rooftop romance. All his spare hours were spent up there; Mrs. Mackenzie knew he was going there, of course—but she didn't know about Frances. She just thought that, having accidentally discovered the roof, he'd taken to using it for sun and fresh air.

"Do you good, dear," she told him, and left him to it, joking that her own mountaineering days were over.

Almost always, Frances would be there when he arrived. Sometimes he would be late himself, and once or twice he couldn't get there at all; but she never complained.

"Can't I ring you up and tell you?" he asked, the first time it happened.

"No, Jim," she said firmly. "Let's keep it like this."

"But you see, I can't always be sure of my hours. In my job, I . . ."

"I don't want to know," she interrupted him, stopping his mouth with a kiss. That changed the subject very effectively, but later she came back to it. "One day, Jim, we'll meet outside. We'll know all about each other, and that'll be quite different."

"No, it won't."

"Oh yes, it will. But just for a few weeks, I don't want to break the spell. There's just you and me, and this little hidden roof, and nothing exists outside."

He stroked her hair. "All right. Just for a few weeks."

She chuckled—the little musical chuckle he was growing to love. "While the sunshine lasts, anyway."

Jim laughed, too, and didn't argue. He, like Frances, was quite happy to keep the spell unbroken for a while. Their private world of golden days—and, now and then, of warm starlit nights—existed in a private dimension of its own, too precious to break.

It fell to pieces at nine o'clock on a Monday morning.

Jim Leigh was walking cheerfully into the station when Sergeant Pitt called to him.

"Oh, morning, Jim. The Inspector's got a job for you. You're through with that warehouse case, aren't you?"

"Till it comes to court—yes, Sarge."

"Fine. Well, we've had a tip-off that Harry Masters' girl may have gone to ground in our manor."

"Good lord—haven't they caught her yet?"

"Someone isn't reading his homework," Pitt said pointedly. "When they sent Harry to the Moor, they still hadn't found her—or the car. Now the car's turned up in a garage in Liverpool, but still no Frankie . . . Here's the file. We'll talk it over when you've read it."

"Right, Sarge."

Jim took the file to his desk and opened it. Smiling at him, unmistakably, was a blown-up photograph of Frances.

He stared at it, shattered.

For five minutes he struggled with himself, miserably. But he was a policeman, and he knew what the answer must be.

"Sarge . . ." he began at last.

At that moment the phone rang, and Pitt turned away to answer it. When he had finished, he put it down and said,

"Well, there's a thing! You can forget Frankie, Jim. Chelsea have picked her up."

"How?" Jim managed to ask.

"In a coffee-bar. Anonymous phone call said she'd be there, and she was."

For a few weeks Jim did try to forget her. He told Sergeant Pitt all about it, and Pitt was wise enough only to pull his leg very gently.

But in the end Jim could take it no longer.

The tan had left her skin, of course; but as he faced her across the table in Holloway Prison, his heart turned over because he knew his own feelings hadn't changed. Her eyes were as expressionless as those of the wardress who stood by the door.

"I only wanted to tell you one thing," he said. "I didn't shop you. I didn't even know about it, or who you were, till the day they picked you up."

Her voice was expressionless, too. "But if you had known, you'd have had to, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, Frances," he said wretchedly. "Thank God I didn't, that's all. Honestly—it wasn't me."

"I know," she told him.

"But how—?"

"I shopped myself. I've finished with all that—I want to be in the clear again. Don't you understand? I'd found out that *you* were a copper—you shouldn't keep your warrant card in your shirt pocket. And I knew that when they did catch me, I'd be burning myself up wondering if it was you who turned me in."

Her eyes dropped to her hands, and she went on, "I couldn't have stood that. Or putting you in the spot where you had to. So I rang Chelsea and told them they'd find Frankie Staines in a coffee-bar in the King's Road."

Jim's head was spinning, but he heard himself ask, "If you felt like that, why didn't you just give yourself up?"

"Because you'd have guessed why I'd done it, and I didn't want you to be . . ." Her voice tailed off. "I think you'd better go now, hadn't you?"

"Frances."

"What?"

"Twelve months isn't very long."

She looked up at him then, and almost smiled. "It'll be summer again."

"It will," Jim said. "I think I'll smarten up that roof a bit."

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PICTURE THIEVES

By Paul Gallico

COLONEL Pierre Roquebrun emerged from his villa, located one kilometre before the village of La Tourette between Vence and Grasse, at nine o'clock on a certain bright, sunshine-filled Riviera Monday morning, and walked down the path to his antique shop situated close to the road where the tourist traffic passed.

His thoughts were stray, diverse, and contented as he let himself into the back door of the elegant shop: a pair of Sèvres vases he hoped to coax out of a widow who lived in St. Paul; the Louis XIII salt cellar that must be sent off to London; some doubts as to the authenticity of a fourteenth-century carved crucifix that had been offered him.

Unlocking the front door, he picked up his copy of the *Nice* paper, and thereafter his thoughts were no longer scattered. For the first page was black with headlines heralding the story of the latest picture robbery, the third apparently in a series of assaults upon world-famous canvases owned by the rich.

In the earlier burglaries an El Greco and a Van Dyck had been stolen from the villa of a Swiss industrialist on the Cap d'Antibes, a man with a young wife who had displayed a strange reluctance to discuss the theft. From another mansion on Cap Ferrat, belonging to the widow of an Argentine cattle baron, canvases by Picasso, Matisse, Gauguin, and Modigliani had vanished. This burglary was accompanied by murder. An aged caretaker, who had apparently struggled to protect the property, had been shot.

The theft during the previous Saturday night, confirmed in the paper before him, of twelve famous Renoirs to the value of

eight hundred thousand pounds from the Villa Fleury, which occupied a commanding position in the hills behind Cannes, was by far the most sensational and the one closest to the Colonel, since the textile millionaire to whom the villa and the pictures belonged was both a client and a personal friend.

As he read on, Colonel Roquebrun's left eyebrow, which was extraordinarily mobile, commenced an ascent which continued until it was practically lost in the wrinkled brown skin of his bald skull. For among the purloined paintings was the famous Blue Renoir, for which the French Government had just concluded negotiations to purchase for the nation for the staggering sum of two million new francs. They had been stolen some time during Saturday night. The picture was to have been removed from the Villa Fleury to the Musée des Maîtres Modernes in Cannes the following Monday. The thieves at one stroke had robbed both the textile magnate and the nation.

The Colonel continued to scan the story. No one had been able to fix a time when the robbery had occurred. There was a night watchman on duty at the Villa Fleury who made regular rounds. He had heard nothing. The burglar alarms and other security precautions were apparently intact, but had given no signal. Joel Heward, the owner of the paintings, was absent in America, but his daughter Sarah, aged twenty, was living there. She had returned from a party with some friends early in the morning, but before retiring had not entered the salon where the pictures were hung.

There were two things about the affair that puzzled the Colonel. One was that this third and most startling robbery did not match the other two in technique. The second was that although twenty-four hours had passed since the affair had taken place, he had heard nothing. Not so much as a mouse had squeaked. There had been no hint of any kind.

Not that a respectable antiquarian, who in addition to the usual cluster of French Honours held several important foreign decorations, might be expected to be a repository of thieves' timetables and schedules, but the fact was that the Colonel had a past. Strange bits of information, gossip, rumour, and fact that came bubbling up out of the Riviera underworld, had a way of reaching his ears, via which they passed inside his bald, polished skull and there remained concealed. The Colonel's thin hard lips rarely opened to divulge information; the Colonel tended his antique shop, bought, sold, and minded his own business.

A car crunched to a halt in the gravel of his driveway. Colonel Roquebrun looked from his newspaper to the window, and saw

the gleaming cream and chrome Jaguar of Sarah Heward, Joel Heward's daughter. She was alone.

He went to meet her, and stood framed in the doorway, a stocky, indomitable figure whose still young, bright blue and clever eyes shone from a battered countenance that had been rebuilt, for he had suffered unspeakable tortures by the Gestapo.

The girl ran towards him from the car so swiftly that her auburn hair streamed out behind her for an instant, and as the Colonel looked into her small, piquante face he saw that she was deathly pale and her hazel eyes dilated.

"Oh, Colonel Roquebrun," she gasped, and then, quite suddenly, burst into tears.

"Sarah, my dear Sarah," said the Colonel, and putting his arm about her shoulder, led her into the shop, for although she was barely twenty they were old friends.

When her tears had finished, she looked up and said, "Isn't it silly of me?"

"Theft is always a shock," the Colonel replied.

The shouting newsprint caught her attention for an instant and she half whispered, "They have stolen Daddy's pictures."

The Colonel nodded. "I was wondering who *they* were." He had not directed the question at her, and therefore was the more surprised by her reply.

"I don't know! People! Anyone, I suppose." Then Sarah gave him a despairing look and whispered, "I'm frightened. Supposing it were all my fault?"

"My dear Sarah, your fault?" But as soon as he put the direct question to her, it appeared momentarily to dissipate her panic, or whatever was causing it, and plunge her into a sea of doubts and evasions.

"It's so utterly absurd," she said. "I'm sure my friends are quite all right. They must be, mustn't they?" And since the Colonel did not reply, being unable to, she continued, "I mean, that's why I have come. You know everyone, don't you—I mean about everyone?" Sarah concluded with sudden passion, as though this would solve all her problems.

The Colonel replied cautiously, "Sometimes. Who are these friends who are troubling you so?"

Sarah replied, "I feel such a fool. You see, Diana has been staying with me at the villa. Daddy has been in New York. I telephoned him. He's flying over tomorrow."

"Diana who?"

"Oh," said Sarah, "there's nothing wrong with Diana. She's English. Diana Finley. Her father has cotton mills. Daddy does business with him. She has a boyfriend."

The Colonel said nothing and Sarah continued, somewhat too quickly, " He's very nice and knows an awful lot about things. Diana's quite mad about Kip."

" Kip? "

" Kip Trenchley. He's really very sweet to Diana."

A faint bell tinkled in the Colonel's well-stocked attic of names, places and people. Ever since a grateful British Government had made him an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, he had considered himself a kind of continuing partner of that country, and therefore read the English newspapers assiduously. The name Kip Trenchley brought up an association he could not place, beyond being aware that it was disagreeable. " Yes," he said, " and the others? "

Sarah blinked at him for a moment, looking as though she wished she had not come and replied hesitantly, " Well, there are really eight of us, two more girls and four men. We've been going places together. The girls, Nicole and Elena, are very nice—I think. I mean, Harry says that they both come from very good French families."

" Harry? " said the Colonel, as though fastening him to a board with a pin.

Doubt again crept into Sarah's voice and gave it something of a little girl quality. " Harry's the one I'm attracted to. He's sort of fascinating."

The Colonel nodded, but withheld comment.

Sarah continued, " Well, there's Marcel Dufour who runs the Blue Grotto restaurant. Everyone knows he's all right. He's an old friend of Kip's."

For the first time during the interview, the Colonel concealed definite alarm. He did know Marcel Dufour and knew, likewise, that he was not at all "all right." As proprietor of the fashionable Blue Grotto restaurant just outside Théoule, patronised by the international set, he was provided with a cover of firm respectability. The snow-white hair and the thin, tanned face that gave him the look of an Indian æsthete, cloaked a wicked man.

" And Count Andrea," Sarah continued. " Paolo Andrea. He's Italian. He's a friend of Harry's."

" Ah, yes," said the Colonel, " Harry. Harry who? "

The colour that flushed Sarah's face gave away her embarrassment, and her voice fell almost to a whisper again. " Isn't it just too utterly ridiculous? I don't know. Just Harry."

And then quickly the words came tumbling forth in a rush of self-reassurance. " He's terribly handsome and has been everywhere. Everyone knows him."

" Then what are you frightened of? "

This time the direct question turned Sarah from a fluttering young thing into something more like her father's daughter. She thought hard and deeply, trying to marshal her feelings into coherence. She said finally, her eyes narrowed with the intensity of her concentration, " I don't really know. I couldn't write it down on paper if I tried and I can hardly express it to you. I never really knew that I ever felt anything before, but yesterday when the house was full of police—and then those awful blank spaces on the walls where the pictures had been—and the police asking me all kinds of questions about where I had been that night and who my friends were . . . well, there it was."

" There what was? "

Sarah's eyes narrowed again and she blinked once more as though to keep out the light of what she was seeing. " Well, the four of them," she said. " Marcel, Kip, Paolo and Harry. The girls don't count—Nicole and Elena, I mean—they're too stupid. Don't you see, when something has been stolen and the police are about, everything somehow begins to look different."

The Colonel said, " Yes, I understand very well."

" I mean," said Sarah, " Count Andrea is very nice but he could be awful, too, couldn't he? "

" Quite," replied the Colonel, suppressing an internal shudder. The very word " Count " was suspect on the Riviera. Then he asked, " And Harry? Harry and you? " Sarah replied quickly with a kind of breathlessness.

" Oh, nothing has happened." And then she added, " I like him terribly, even though sometimes he worries me. Nothing has happened—but don't you see—it could."

The Colonel now regarded the young girl gravely and asked, " And just what is it you wish me to do, Sarah? "

Sarah folded her hands with the earnestness of her plea. " Come and look, would you? We're dining tonight at the Society Club in Cannes. Just come and sit somewhere and see. You know so much about everyone. You might be able to tell whether I am just being silly and childish, or whether "—and here she gave a quick little shudder—" I'm right to be frightened."

" Very well," said the Colonel, " I'll come. You will, of course, not recognise me."

Sarah nodded her head vigorously. She said, " Oh, thank you. It's the kind of thing I couldn't even tell Daddy."

The Colonel accompanied her to the door and stood watching her as she walked across to her car. But halfway there she turned, and stood uncertainly for a moment.

" You see," she cried then, " the utterly stupid, absurd and ridiculous thing is that they couldn't possibly have done it. We

were all together that night. Harry didn't leave me until five o'clock in the morning." And then with a kind of wail, as though expecting to be disbelieved, she repeated, "But nothing happened, I promise you, we just danced and kissed a little. But he couldn't have done it—it was already light. And yet . . ."

They stood there for a moment facing one another, the inescapable alibi between them like a living thing. The Colonel's heart was torn by the fear and anguish that lay behind Sarah's cry that nothing had happened. But one day, indeed, it might. This was the game of the Harrys who prowled the Riviera. They were tough and predatory, and young girls were weak, foolish, and avid. But he said only, "I see." He nodded towards the newspaper and asked, "Is that part true about the Blue Renoir going to the Museum?"

"Yes. It was supposed to go today. There's an exhibition beginning there. After that it is to go to the Louvre. Why?"

The Colonel merely grunted. He reflected that, if nothing else, the burglary was timely. The security at the Musée des Maîtres Modernes was known to be extraordinarily competent, and at the Louvre, of course, unassailable. He said, "I'll be there this evening, and after that we will see. Do not worry."

He watched her as she got into her car and drove off. At least a part of the weight seemed to have been lifted from her shoulders by his promise.

The noise of Sarah's departing vehicle had hardly died away, when the car of the second early caller that morning ground to a halt outside the shop. The Colonel did not know whether he was pleased or angry at the visit, but in view of the tidings in the newspaper he was certainly not surprised to see Captain Scoubide, Superintendent of the Detective Force of the district.

The Colonel and Captain Scoubide exchanged good mornings, and Roquebrun thought that the small, clever eyes of the detective were darting about his shop almost as though he had expected to find the stolen pictures hanging on the walls, and was frankly disappointed when he failed to see them.

Captain Scoubide, dressed in slacks, sandals and short-sleeved, open-necked shirt, did not look like a policeman but more like one of the thousands of tourists swarming the south of France that summer. Nevertheless, he was a very good one, since he was capable and not entirely honest; his dishonesty was on the side of the angels, an almost essential quality in a detective operating on the Riviera.

Captain Scoubide had been drawn to Colonel Roquebrun's antique shop that morning by one of those policeman's hunches

that come from nowhere and every so often pay off most astonishingly. The question that was agitating Captain Scoubide, who was small, dapper and narrow-faced, was how to tackle the subject and still remain "correct."

The Colonel, well aware of Captain Scoubide's difficulty, was at first inclined to let him wriggle, but then took pity and said, "Can I help you, Captain?"

Scoubide was instantly into the breach, his head cocked to one side, as he replied, "Well, can you?"

Such abruptness was verging upon "incorrectness," and the Colonel felt compelled to challenge him. "My dear Scoubide!"

But the Captain's roving eyes were now unmistakably halted upon the *Nice* paper with its black headlines and strings of zeros denoting the worth of the robbery. "Have you heard anything?" he asked.

"And why, my friend, should you think that I would have heard something?"

Captain Scoubide made a deprecating gesture. "Your formidable reputation has not diminished, Colonel. Everyone knows you. Everyone trusts you. Everyone is your friend, from the highest to the lowest."

The Colonel remained silent at this, and Scoubide continued. "During your days as a leader of the Resistance this entire area was under your command. There was every kind enrolled in your secret army . . . perhaps someone might have talked to you."

The Colonel thought to himself, What the devil is he driving at?

Captain Scoubide shrugged and replied merely, "One meets so many people." He looked about the antique shop again. "The question which puzzles me is how they will market them."

The Colonel nodded. "That is indeed a problem."

"How would you dispose of them?" Captain Scoubide asked. "After all, you are in the business, so to speak."

The Colonel's face flushed red, colouring all but the white scar that ran from his ear along his jawline. He said, "Are you not somewhat wanting in tact, my dear Captain?"

Captain Scoubide threw up his hands, horrified at being misunderstood. "No, no, no!" he protested. "A thousand pardons! The question was purely hypothetical. If one had such valuable pictures to sell . . ."

". . . one would realise, if one were not a congenital lunatic, that the market is extremely limited and the transaction likely to be accompanied by considerable publicity," the Colonel concluded.

Captain Scoubide looked thoughtful and repeated, "Congenital idiot! That's a good one. I have just been sniffing about the scene of the crime and do you know what struck me? The

mad slickness! The chances that were taken and got away with. The amateur professionalism of it."

Colonel Roquebrun lifted an eyebrow to distract Captain Scoubide from what might otherwise have been taken as a startled reaction. "How could that be?" he asked.

"A professional job done by amateurs, perhaps?"

The drift was now unmistakable to Colonel Roquebrun, and he thought it high time to bring the conversation to an end. He said, "I never heard of burglaries and paradoxes mixing. Why not inquire of Marcel Dufour at the Blue Grotto? He would give you an excellent meal, during which you could make up your mind whether his restaurant was a professional or an amateur activity."

Captain Scoubide laughed, and then made a grimace. "He has too many connections," he said. "One could get one's nose pinched in the door there. A large reward has been offered."

The Colonel wondered where this was leading, but merely commented, "Yes, 250,000 new francs. The insurance company, I suppose?"

"500,000," Captain Scoubide corrected. "The Government has doubled it. A matter of national pride. The Blue Renoir was destined for the Louvre, you know." And then he added, with what struck the Colonel as almost a curious and pathetic kind of wistfulness, "I would not wish for myself any part of it. For me, the glory of recovering the pictures undamaged would be sufficient."

The Colonel commented gravely, "I sincerely hope your distinguished career will be crowned by this achievement."

The Captain acknowledged the compliment and prepared to leave. "Should anything reach your ears . . ." he said.

"Naturally," Roquebrun concluded and, seriously reflecting, watched through the window as the Captain marched to his black Citroën and departed. The Colonel was feeling most uncomfortable.

The four picture thieves sat, gloomy and sweating, at the back of a dark and scruffy little bar known as Le Perroquet Rouge, off the Place de la République in Antibes. Their names were Gaston Rive, Antoine Petitpierre, Jean Soleau, and Alfonse Cousin. Some twenty years before they had each had a nickname and were known respectively as Le Léopard, Le Tigre, L'Eléphant, and Le Loup, and naturally when one of their operations was discussed they were referred to as "the Zoo."

None of this menagerie resembled the noms-de-guerre they had chosen for themselves. Jean Soleau, the Elephant, was a wry, dried-up shrimp of a man, a wholesale dealer in onions. Gaston

Rive, the Leopard, was enormous, fat and slothful. He had been corpulent even in his Resistance days when this obesity had provided him with good cover against the Germans. Now fatter than ever, he was the proprietor of a small electrical contracting business in Antibes.

No one could have been less like his namesake than Antoine Petitpierre, the Tiger. A carnation grower who owned a plantation behind Haut-Cagnes, he was a tall, cadaverous, mild-mannered, melancholy man. During the war when it had been necessary for them to carry out an execution, he was always the one most emotionally disturbed.

The last of the group, Le Loup, or the Wolf as Alfonse Cousin had been known, was the owner of the bar. Cousin did have something lupine about him, dark and lean with glowing eyes and a sardonic mouth.

The door to the back room was shut so that their murmur of desultory conversation could not be overheard. A silent radio stood on the sideboard. The copy of the *Nice* paper lay on the table. The Tiger said, " Dear God, whoever would have thought there would have been such a fuss over a few pictures? "

The Wolf gave a snort. " You call a millionaire's Renoir collection a few pictures? "

The Leopard had asthma as well as too much blubber, and his breath whistled through his nostrils as he exclaimed, " 500,000 francs reward! " He nodded his head in the direction of the radio. " You heard it! "

The Elephant said, " Every stool-pigeon in the neighbourhood will be trying to earn it."

The Leopard sighed like an engine discharging steam. " And the police are setting up road blocks. We shall never be able to move them now."

The Elephant eyed him coldly. " Are you proposing, then, to leave them in my warehouse among my onions till the flics descend upon us? "

The Wolf leaned darkly across the table, poking a long finger at the Elephant. " Can you suggest an alternative, old friend? "

No one had anything to offer.

The Tiger leaned back in his chair and examined his fingernails. " Perhaps we were a little too hasty."

" I said we should have consulted Le Renard," put in the Elephant.

The Wolf laughed silently. " The Fox would have vetoed it."

The Leopard said, " He was always our leader . . ."

". . . and the only one of us with any brains," concluded the Elephant.

The Tiger completed the inspection of his fingernails and said with glum fervour, " I wish he was here with us now."

It was characteristic of the kind of courage they all had that the sharp knock on the door that followed this wish did not panic them. Not a man moved.

The Wolf said, " Entrez! "

The door opened. Colonel Roquebrun stood framed in the doorway, thickset, bull-necked, florid.

" Renard! " The word exploded from the blubbery lips of the fat Leopard. " We were just wishing . . ."

Colonel Roquebrun came into the room, shutting the door carefully behind him. He eyed them coldly. " You idiots," he said, " where are the pictures? "

The dark eyes of the Wolf glowed and his sardonic mouth permitted itself a smile. The old Fox was still the Fox. One did not have to draw diagrams for him. He said, " In Jean's warehouse among the onions. Smelly, but safe."

Contempt marked the scarred features of the Colonel. " And what the devil do you think you are going to do with them? Give me a drink, someone." He sat down at the table while the Wolf reached behind to a cognac bottle and poured him a fin. They sat and watched him like four guilty children while he knocked it back.

Roquebrun set down his empty glass and sat staring silently at the four, who eventually began to recover some of their aplomb. After all, they were grown men banded together in a dangerous adventure that was far from concluded.

The Colonel quickly felt the return of this truculence and challenged them. " Well, my clever ones, and now that you have them stored among the onions, what do you intend to do? Advertise for a South American millionaire? Take them on tour? Or transport them to Paris and set up a stand in the lobby of the Folies-Bergère—GENUINE RENOIRS FOR SALE? "

The carnation-growing Tiger, the most mild-mannered of them all, chose to reply. " There's no need for your sarcasm, Pierre, you know very well we didn't do it for gain. We were going to ransom the pictures for the poor."

Colonel Roquebrun, who had been sitting tilted back in his chair in a somewhat superior attitude, was so startled by this that he returned his seat to the floor with a crash, repeating, " Ransom for the poor! "

They were on him like children pressing home an advantage.

" Two million francs paid to a textile magnate so rich he cannot count his money! "

" And in France people are going hungry! "

"Imagine, one man owning paintings worth tens of millions!"

"And in the house next to me the husband of my neighbour, Madame Aubert, may die because they can't afford an operation and a hospital."

"The Government steals from us in taxes, and spends it on a rag with some paint daubed over it."

"There aren't enough schools or hospitals."

"The situation is rotten. This will call attention to it."

Colonel Roquebrun said, "What kind of talk is this? Have you all become communists?" and he spat on the floor.

"On the contrary," replied the Wolf, "we merely propose to protect the rich from their own idiocies. It is they who create communists with this madness of spending."

"My father knew Renoir in Cagnes," said the Elephant. "They were neighbours. He said he was a modest little man, riddled with arthritis, who did not think himself a god or anything extraordinary because he put paint on canvas. He was content, when he was young, to receive four hundred or five hundred francs for a painting, or even leave a little sketch at a bistro in payment for his bill. What has happened to these same paintings

of my father's friend to make them worth millions? Where has the money come from? Where does it go? Who is being robbed? Who is being enriched?"

The Colonel's self-possession was returning. "No one, you donkey," he said. "No one is enriched; no one is impoverished; the wealthy trade these objects among themselves, like children playing with picture cards found in packages of soaps or cereals. If two youngsters set about exchanging postage stamps, who in the community is injured, and in what manner has the economy suffered?"

The Wolf saw the point and grinned wickedly, but the others were making hard going of it. The Leopard shook his head and said, "The rich always find a way to profit."

The Colonel snorted. "It seems to me, my innocents," he said, "that you have got hold of the wrong end of the stick. You may be fighting a just war, but against the wrong enemy. It isn't the very rich who are a danger to any country, but the ignorant poor. It is the latter who are always trying to pull down the structure and entomb themselves with it, instead of endeavouring to learn how wealth is acquired and following the example. And for that matter, you halfwits," the Colonel continued, "who is it that supports charities, endows foundations, creates universities, aids hospitals, and makes possible research intended to relieve every human ailment? It is the rich. The world today would be unspeakably ghastly if the philanthropies of the wealthy were to come to an end. You can afford to leave them their toys."

They sat blinking at the Colonel, taken aback for a moment. Then the Leopard heaved his huge bulk in his chair, pursed his small mouth, and said, "What about the Government getting into your innocent scheme and handing over millions of our money for something which in our father's day fetched no more than a few hundred francs?"

The Colonel said, "Have you never encountered the phrase 'man cannot live by bread alone'? The nation's pride reposes in the handiwork of her gifted sons. It is something in which every man, woman, and child can share."

The Elephant, Jean Soleau, said, "You weren't so damned moral in the old days, Pierre, when we were under your leadership. It was you who planned the robbery of the military funds from the Crédit National at Aix from which we took fifty million francs; it was you who organised the capture of the gold transport convoy on its way to Marseilles; it was you who evolved the the technique of stripping the villas of the collaborators on the Riviera of food, wines, and clothing."

The memory of those times evoked a nod from the Colonel. "Hah," he said, "I taught you the value of paper bullets in those days, did I not? We hit the Germans and the collaborators where it hurt them most—in the pocketbook." His glance strayed to his queerly shaped fingers which had no fingernails at their ends, and he grimaced involuntarily. "And paid, too."

The Wolf said stubbornly, "I don't see the difference, Pierre. In the FFI we fought collaborators. They were Frenchmen, too, like ourselves, but they were enemies. France is menaced by as many enemies internally today, as she was during the war. What is wrong with using a little of the same technique as in the past?"

"We thought we would put some real worth into those paintings, Pierre," the Tiger said. "As it stands now, you yourself are willing to admit that these values are false. We planned to ransom the Blue Renoir and the others for ten million francs, and turn the money over to charity. Thus, the pictures would represent a hundred hospital beds, some thousands of tons of coal, and hundreds of thousands of pounds of food and milk for the hungry. Then when one stood admiringly in front of the Blue Renoir one could say, 'Ah yes, this is indeed a valuable picture. It has paid its way.' Let the spirit be fed indeed, but bread must come first."

The Colonel for a moment was so startled by this idea that he leaned forward in his chair. "By jove," he said.

"That's it!" exclaimed the Elephant. "We knew you would see it our way."

The Colonel laughed and shook his head. "Beautiful, poetic and immoral," he said.

The Wolf snorted, "Immoral!"

"Immoral," repeated the Colonel. "It will not do, my cloud-dwelling cuckoos. In the world of 1944 it was both necessary and effective. This is the world of 1963."

"Eh? What's the difference?" the Elephant pouted. "The old war was hot, the new one is cold. We're still combatants."

"Why," said the Colonel, "just that the world of today is so infinitely more corrupt, wicked and immoral, that one more immorality piled on top of it only gets lost in the shuffle. Ransom is just another form of blackmail and bribery. Some insurance companies would not hesitate to enter into a shady deal with you in order to cut their losses; the police might connive with you to split the reward and get back the stolen goods if they could; and the public would not ask any questions provided their treasure was restored. Whom are you educating? Instead of light you bring more darkness."

They sat around silently, looking unhappy.

"Well now," said Colonel Roquebrun, "since you have admitted practically that you have committed the stupidity of the century, and that none of the reasons for your coup will for one moment bear the light of intelligent scrutiny, what other excuses have you to offer for abandoning the dignity of the good lives you have all achieved, and turning yourselves into criminals?"

Once more the four exchanged guilty glances, and in the end it was Antoine Petitpierre, the melancholy Tiger, who replied, "Renard, all of us suddenly found ourselves growing old: a toothless Tiger, a clawless Leopard, an Elephant with fading memories, a Wolf with failing appetite. We sat here one evening and talked of the old days when we made the Germans tremble. We longed for one final adventure."

The Colonel threw back his head and let out a roar of laughter, and when it had subsided he cried, "But now for the first time you have been talking sense. If you had only come to me when this feeling overwhelmed you we would not be in this pickle today. There would have been some brains about the affair."

The Wolf regarded the Colonel curiously. "You say *we*, old friend? Do you really mean we?"

"Don't ask foolish questions," the Colonel replied brusquely. "Why do you think I'm here, with Captain Scoubide practically breathing down my neck? You, my dear Leopard, I'll wager left your signature all over the electrical work in the villa when you disconnected the alarm." Here the Colonel's professional interest suddenly took over. "By the way, how was that done? If there is any tampering with the alarm it registers immediately at the police station."

"Oh," replied the Leopard with superb innocence, "I took the precaution of disconnecting it at the police station end."

Again the Colonel shook with laughter. "Bravo, Leopard!"

"What, then, do you suggest?" asked the Elephant.

"A little morality," replied the Colonel. "It might shine out like a light in the darkness. The pictures must be returned."

"But how?" asked the practical Wolf.

"In such a manner as to cause the light to shine," replied the Colonel, and for the first time they realised that he had the glimmer of a plan.

Colonel Roquebrun drove his Simca station-wagon up the twisting road into the hills behind Cannes until he came to an arched gateway with a small, modest sign at the side: Society Club—Privé—Members Only.

A hundred yards within there was a dark, sprawling villa and a carpark. There appeared to be very little illumination. His

neighbours in the carpark were Rolls-Royces, Bentleys, Cadillacs, Mercedes and several fast Italian sports cars. It was nine o'clock in the evening. He heard the rambling tinkling of a bar pianist. There seemed to be no one about.

Left to find his way, Colonel Roquebrun saw an outside iron staircase and climbed it to find himself on a balcony off which rooms opened. He came upon a young girl standing there in a nightdress, looking down into the shadowy garden. Even by starlight he saw that she was exquisite. "Oh," he said, "I beg your pardon."

The eyes she turned upon him were the misty, understanding, melancholy ones of the hetaerae. She said, "The entrance is below, just beyond the tree there," and went back into the room from whence she had come. Colonel Roquebrun heard a man's cough, the creaking of a bed, and then muffled laughter. As he descended, he reflected upon the nature of the Society from which the Club took its name.

He came to an entrance beneath a canopy. A doorman in uniform eyed him uncertainly and asked, "Are you a member?"

"No," said the Colonel, "but . . ." and between his fingers there showed a hundred-franc note.

"Of course," said the doorman, "it can be arranged." The Colonel handed over his card and the note. The man took them and disappeared inside.

This, the Colonel thought, was the fatality of the France of today—the words Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité rimming the coins might well be replaced by the slogan, "It can be arranged."

The doorman returned with a gold-embossed card between his fingers. "Monsieur is welcome," he said, and led him down a long unlit corridor and through the bar which was also dark. The piano player was lightly fingering nostalgic, sentimental tunes. A dark-haired girl was leaning against a doorway, clad in a bikini and holding a half-empty cocktail glass, a secret smile at the corners of her mouth. There were several men sitting at the bar, but no one was paying any attention to her. The Colonel supposed there was nothing essentially wrong about a bikini at nine o'clock in the evening, but somehow the effect was extraordinarily sinister. He was glad he had come.

Beyond the bar was the dining terrace. The head waiter in a white dinner-jacket waved a menu at the Colonel, and led him to a table from which he could look down upon the curve of Cannes, bedecked in her night jewellery spread out below. On the terrace the only illumination was the glow of tiny lamps on the tables. Roquebrun was aware that the place was already half-filled. He ordered a dry Martini. The piano tinkled soothingly.

The girl in the bikini stood for a moment looking out across the terrace with moist eyes, then walked off down a path, her hips swaying. From near by came the gentle splashing of a fountain, and off to the left the Colonel saw starlight reflected in a swimming-pool. The setting was superb. But Roquebrun was remembering how it felt when he had waited in ambush in the darkness, surrounded by the Germans.

By ten o'clock every table but one upon the terrace had been occupied. The Colonel's eyes had now adjusted to the dim light to the point where he could make out features, and he felt as though transported into another world. Here was collected a kind of international scum—the froth that would come to the top if all the wicked of the world were boiled together in a cauldron. The men with their smooth, parchment-like faces and immaculate clothes sat behind their dark glasses, sleek, slick, oily, overbearing and arrogant: Americans, British, Spaniards, Italians, Frenchmen. Pretty girls decorated their tables and were paid no more attention by them than the furniture. These were no small dispensers of evil. These were the wholesalers. Somehow it was the dark glasses which oppressed the Colonel. Even in the murk of the Club these men could not bear so much as the gleam of a candle, and he thought of sunless sewers where rats scurried. They were the smelly rich and their hangers-on who coined their money out of human weakness. Here were collected the vultures of the world pretending to be people. The Colonel felt as though he wanted a bath.

The head waiter, with his menu card held high in front of him to show that important people were arriving, threaded a party through the narrow aisles of the crowded tables, and Roquebrun saw that it was Sarah Heward and her friends.

He noted that one of the girls was the dark-haired one who had been in the bar in a bikini, and the second was of the same class. The other girl was obviously the English girl who was staying with Sarah. The man who accompanied her, he recognised as Kip Trenchley from photographs in British newspapers, and Roquebrun remembered now why the association had been unpleasant. Trenchley's speciality, one gathered, was trafficking in featherbrained debutantes. He lured them to the Continent, entangled them, and then sold them back to their fathers who paid to avoid scandal.

Count Paolo Andrea, the Italian, was easily recognisable. If there were remnants of nobility in his features they were almost obliterated by weakness and dissipation. Roquebrun thought he could guess his function in this unsavoury quartet.

But the man who raised the Colonel's hackles, and for an

instant turned him sick with apprehension for Sarah, was the tall one known as Harry. He was wearing a lilac-coloured dinner-jacket, and his eyes were hidden behind the inevitable dark glasses. The Colonel felt there was real reason for this concealment, for he was sure these would be the cold, expressionless eyes of the killer. There was no mistaking the cruel mouth. This was the new type of American crook-of-all-trades that had emerged from the army after the war, with Europe as its field of operations. The fourth member was Marcel Dufour. His sensitive face silhouetted against the table lamp gave him the aspect of a poet.

It was an ideal quartet, the Colonel thought: a French gang leader, a British blackmailer, a shady Italian, and an American killer, and he thought what a jungle this Riviera was for all its innocence and loveliness of the sea reflecting the night sky, the beacons flashing from the mountains outlined against that same sky, and the necklace of lights, like blue diamonds stringing the waterfront. How easily the girls had become ensnared.

He had seen enough, and now the Colonel sighed with a kind of long ago remembered pleasure. Colonel Pierre Roquebrun, the respected antique dealer, was no more. Le Renard had returned, the old game was on again. He called for his bill, paid it, and made his way out, passing the table on his way. Except for the momentary dilation of her eyes, Sarah Heward gave no sign of recognition.

The abrupt departure of Colonel Roquebrun had left Sarah with a feeling of desolation. As long as he was there she felt safe. Now that he had gone she became once more prey to all her fears and doubts. She wondered how long it would be before she would be able to contact him again and hear his judgment of the men with whom she had become involved.

The swiftness with which this contact was realised was startling, for it took place, to be exact, no more than twenty minutes later when she went to visit the ladies' powder-room. The woman in attendance there, without saying a word, slipped a small piece of paper into her hand. There was no one else in the room at the time. Sarah opened it and read: *Not nice. Keep your nerve. There will be a ransom note. They will take over. Let them. They will suggest you go home. Do so. R.* For a moment Sarah felt the dizzying clutch of panic. Then the cool strength of the hand that had been stretched out to her through the note steadied her. She tore the paper into shreds, and returned to the table. There was no question as to the confirmation of her fears.

Shortly after midnight, as they were debating whether to go to the Casino or on to the nightclub in Juan-les-Pins which was offering a new troupe of transvestites direct from Paris, a waiter

came to the table and handed Sarah an envelope. Conversation died away. Sarah was conscious that they were all staring at her.

Kip Trenchley tittered and cried, " Oh, I say, Sarah's got an admirer. Harry's going to be chucked! "

For an instant Sarah was again aware of the trap into which she had fallen from the manner in which the Englishman had coupled her name with Harry's. She was already considered Harry's property. She remembered the Colonel's admonition, *Keep your nerve.* She opened the envelope and read the printed note:

We have the pictures. The identification number 2XRYB5342 concealed on the Blue Renoir will prove this to your father. We are businessmen and prepared to negotiate for their return. When your father arrives in the morning bring him in your white car to the crossroads sign below Piol by the Minoury Farm where you will be met. We are in a position to see every road in the valley leading to the rendezvous. If there is any indication that your car is being followed, or observed from the air by helicopter or aircraft, the pictures will be destroyed.

A half-smile illuminated the gentle countenance of Marcel Dufour. He said, " I hope it does not contain bad news? "

There will be a ransom note, Colonel Roquebrun had written. *They will take over. Let them.* Sarah said, " It's—it's about the pictures. A ransom note . . . they say . . ."

" The pictures! " It was almost like a conjurer's trick the way they had the note out of Sarah's fingers and were reading it avidly, passing it from one to the other.

Harry rose quietly and left the table to reappear a few moments later. He said, " Nix! Kid on a bicycle rode up, handed it to the doorman and blew."

Sarah said, " Ought we to notify the police? "

" No," said Marcel Dufour, " in no circumstances."

Sarah was suddenly aware that she had been pushed completely out of the affair. The four had managed to switch seats with the other girls and were now gathered round two corners of the table, their heads together, re-reading and whispering. Harry had removed his dark glasses to see better, and it seemed to Sarah that his eyes were filled with a curious kind of animal glare.

" I think the girls had better go home," Harry said.

" Yes, yes," Dufour added, " we'll handle this for you. We know how to deal with such matters. Leave everything to us." Count Andrea was already summoning the waiter for the bill. " And order a taxi at once," he added. " Subito! "

Sarah suddenly felt as though she was acting in a play and thoroughly at home with her lines. She saw again the Colonel's note: *They will suggest you go home. Do so.* How had he known?

The four still had their heads together over the note. Marcel Dufour snapped his fingers and said, " I have it! There can be only one place! But we can verify this."

The waiter returned. " The taxi is waiting, Monsieur."

Harry said to Trenchley, " You take 'em home, Kip."

The Englishman hesitated. " But . . ." The fever of avidity which burnt in the others had set him alight, too. Here was big stuff.

Harry looked at him coldly. " I said take 'em home," he repeated. " Stick to your own racket."

Sarah and the other girl rose. Harry turned to Sarah and said, " Just you go off to bed, honey, and don't worry your little head. We'll have your old man's pictures back for you."

The words were kind, but the left-over expression of murderous cupidity on the face of the American had not yet caught up with them, and Sarah looked straight through the façade of the man who had so attracted her, to the beast behind. As though by the magic of Colonel Roquebrun she had been suffered a glimpse into the abyss. She shuddered inwardly and formulated a silent little prayer of gratitude. But she merely said, " Thank you," and permitted Trenchley to escort them.

As they left, the three were again back in their whispering conclave and did not even look up.

The members of " the Zoo " sat about uneasily on bags of onions at one end of the long warehouse, topping the hill above Piol. The windows were shaded with sacking to keep light from showing. Beneath the tumbled heap of sacks of onions gleamed one corner of a gold picture frame.

Colonel Roquebrun glanced at his watch. " I must be going," he said, " I think your visitors ought to be along shortly."

" I don't like it," said the Elephant. " Supposing they're satisfied to pick up the reward and go on to the police . . ."

" They won't be," said Colonel Roquebrun, " and you'll have to like it." He addressed them all now. " You won't, I think, be hurt if you control your natural truculence, but that is a risk you must take. These are dangerous men. They may already have killed once. You will most certainly have to swallow a certain amount of insults and possibly have to put up with one or two indignities. Control yourselves and accept them."

The Wolf grinned and said, " If it comes off it will be cheap at the price."

Colonel Roquebrun went to the door and said, " They will probably come in a van from the Blue Grotto. Friend Elephant, you must be prepared to lose a few sacks of your onions as well

as your pretty pictures. Well, good luck!" and he was gone.

It was indeed the van of the Blue Grotto restaurant which drew up before the warehouse shortly before four o'clock in the morning. The pick-up van of one of the best known restaurants on the Riviera paying an early morning visit to an onion wholesaler would not arouse police suspicion.

And there were the insults and indignities which "the Zoo" accepted with reasonable fortitude, considering that one of the trio that burst in on them was armed with a long-barrelled Luger.

They did not even bother to conceal their features, Dufour, Count Andrea and Harry. Thieves engaged in the profitable and invulnerable business of robbing other thieves had nothing to fear, particularly where those others were amateurs, so stupid and untutored as to give away their hiding-place in their ransom note. It had taken Marcel Dufour, who knew the district, only a few minutes with a survey map to figure out that the only spot from which all roads approaching the Minoury Farm could be observed was the warehouse of the onion dealer, Jean Soleau.

They were rough, too, needlessly so, and cruel, as indeed the Colonel had thought they might be, for the ease of the hi-jacking operation and the insoluble predicament of the four men they found collected in the warehouse with their stolen art treasures fed their arrogance to bursting point. Besides, there was jealousy. The Leopard suffered a cut cheek where he was hit with the pistol barrel; the Elephant had the wind knocked out of him; the Tiger was kicked in the groin.

When the pictures had been transferred to the van and buried beneath layers of sacks stuffed with fat, golden-brown onions, the gang leader's ego could not resist lecturing for a moment. "This will teach you amateurs not to encroach upon the field of professionals. You should be grateful to me for taking these paintings off your hands and absolving you from the risks connected with disposing of them. For our part," and the sensitive expression of Monsieur Dufour's thin lips and nostrils made it seem almost like a benediction, "we shall always remember you as having saved us a great deal of trouble. We had planned to remove them from the villa ourselves."

Then, having cut the telephone wires and removed the distributors from the cars in the garage, they departed.

Antoine Petitpierre was still gasping from the brutality of his injury. Gaston Rive, the Leopard, was weeping openly with tears of rage and frustration. "Le Renard owes me one for this," he said. "I'll have it out of his hide!"

The darkly sardonic Wolf, Monsieur Cousin, said to him, "Keep quiet. You don't know how lucky you are . . . how

lucky all of us are." For he was thinking of Colonel Roquebrun, where he would probably be at that moment and the telephone call he would be making, and the Wolf added, " Thank God, the brains of the old Fox are still working."

Colonel Roquebrun had not had much sleep that night, yet this did not vary his routine of opening his shop the following morning by so much as a minute. The Colonel had known times when he had gone fifty hours without closing an eye and yet remained alert and efficient. It was just twenty-four hours since Sarah Heward had drawn up before his shop in her Jaguar. He wondered who his first visitor would be.

A squeal of brakes and the crunch of tyres answered his question. It was Captain Scoubide.

The Captain appeared exactly as he had the morning before, for he had not yet had time to change his clothes. The only difference was that the left sleeve of his shirt had been ripped from shoulder to cuff, and through the gap showed the red of a long scratch.

For the rest, the Captain was just as concerned that morning with maintaining " correctness " as he had been the day before, and he fingered one or two of the more expensive items of the Colonel's stock to give him time to reflect before he turned and said, " Thank you for the tip."

" Not at all," replied the Colonel.

" Concerning the matter of the reward—" here the Captain coughed—" it may be necessary to split with me in order to avoid embarrassing questions."

" I fully understand this," agreed the Colonel.

" Still," the Captain suggested, " 250,000 francs is a tidy sum."

The Colonel picked up a fourteenth-century ivory crucifix. " One always finds uses for unexpected sums of money."

" Such as, for instance, the husband of Madame Aubert? "

The Colonel never batted an eye. " Poor woman," he said.

The Colonel's gaze was now so unmistakably upon the rent in his shirt that Captain Scoubide felt compelled to refer to it. " Nothing," he said, " nothing at all—fellow at the door—he was momentarily argumentative."

" The pictures? " suggested the Colonel.

" Oh yes," muttered Captain Scoubide, ". . . quite. In the cellar. Not only the Renoirs but the others as well."

" Ah," said the Colonel, " I thought perhaps they might . . ."

" A veritable petit Louvre," the Captain said. " The El Greco, the Van Dycks, the Moderns, and two Breughels which had not yet even been reported stolen. I believe they expected to transfer them to South America."

" How embarrassing for Monsieur Dufour and his friends. I gather they were all there? "

" All except the Englishman."

" The little blackmailer . . ."

Captain Scoubide permitted himself a grim smile. " That pigeon will keep," he said. " Another time. He was not implicated in the actual robberies, he merely provided the wealthy contacts. Dufour was the brains; the Count, the art expert who selected the paintings, and Harry was the gun. He killed the caretaker in the Cap Ferrat robbery."

The Colonel nodded. " He was also the charmer. He worked on the women so that they were reluctant to complain. Excellent! I trust everything went smoothly? "

" Well, actually . . ." the Captain began.

The Colonel sent his left eyebrow once more towards the top of his bald head.

" Harry," explained Captain Scoubide. " When we wished to descend . . . he was so imprudent as to produce his weapon and discharge it at me. He shot too carelessly. My bullet killed him. I will receive a decoration for this, no doubt."

" And deservedly, my friend, deservedly," the Colonel congratulated wholeheartedly and with genuine admiration. He was of the school that enjoyed putting violence in its place with cool nonchalance. Nevertheless, the violence had taken place, and so experienced in it was the Colonel that he saw it almost as though he had been there: the bottom of the cellar stairs, perhaps, with all the advantage with Harry standing below. Lugers had an ear-splitting detonation in confined quarters and their muzzles had a way of spitting sparks as well as lead.

" He shot too carelessly," Scoubide had said. Roquebrun imagined then that the little detective would have fired between the first and second shots from the Luger. He had probably shot Harry through the body, and the Colonel for an instant pictured the surprised look that must have come across Harry's face. For no one ever expects to die.

Aloud he added, with satisfaction, " That was a mouth that wanted stopping." For he was thinking of Sarah and how she would have been smirched by the alibi Harry would have claimed if he had been brought to trial.

" It was your warning that he would be armed that enabled me to be prepared," acknowledged the Captain. The Colonel bowed. The liquidation of Harry pleased him enormously. It was one of those fortuitous bits of luck sometimes encountered. It had been a loose end which had worried him, and in all his operations as a Commander of the FFI the Colonel had been a tidy man.

The Captain began to move towards the door, but hesitatingly, and Roquebrun suspected there might still be something on his mind. He was right in his judgment.

Scoubide coughed once more deprecatingly and said, " By the way, some friends of yours who live in the vicinity of the Minoury Farm have suffered a little inconvenience, one hears. Their telephone has been cut, their cars damaged; one of them has come by an injury to his face, another a painful bruise. Nothing serious though, I'm told."

" How kind of you to let me know," the Colonel said. " I must pay them a visit and extend them my sympathy."

The Captain remained yet another instant in the doorway, an expression almost of tenderness and affection on his features. He said, " I'm very pleased with you, my friend, pleased and proud." And then, since there was no way by which the Colonel could receive a medal for his share in the night's work, the Captain proceeded to decorate him with one last little florid speech, which might have proved embarrassing had it not been so utterly sincere. " France survived her defeat in the war and lives because of such as you." Then he turned and fled.

The next arrival was not unexpected either. It was the Jaguar of Sarah Heward, only Sarah was not in it. It was her father, Joel Heward, who was alone in the driver's seat.

The millionaire, a widower and a startlingly handsome man, wasted no time in getting to the point. He said, " I arrived several hours ago. Sarah was at the airport and I have spoken to Captain Scoubide. I have come to thank you."

" Ah," said Colonel Roquebrun, " for the return of the pictures . . ."

" No," said Joel Heward, " for the return of Sarah."

There was then a moment of silent understanding between the two men before Heward spoke again. He began at a tangent. " The pictures were insured—besides which they were only things. But Sarah . . ." He hesitated and then said, " Sarah has told me everything. It's my fault that she has been running a little wild since her mother died. I have neglected her. I shan't again. That's when the Harrys move in. She is a very lucky girl that you were here."

The Colonel managed to look suitably modest and deprecating, hoping in the depths of his soul that never, never, not ever, would Mr. Joel Heward hear so much as a whisper of the renaissance of " the Zoo."

Heward had fallen into a moment's musing at the conclusion of which he said, " My good friend Pierre. I should like to do something in return, if you would permit it. Something—anything—

that might lie close to your heart, for I know very well what manner of person you are and the nature of your charities. Would you permit it?"

The forked lightnings of thought, a billion times faster than speech, flashed through the mind of the Colonel as he remembered his four former comrades in arms and the idea behind their last romantic and abortive adventure. The reward money would help to alleviate local distress, but theirs had been a grander idea. "Yes," he said, "give us a hospital, Joel. Up to date, with every modern appliance and always beds free to the poor."

"Done," said the millionaire, "you shall have it."

"And I think," Colonel Roquebrun was saying, ". . . I think I should like it known as L'Hôpital du Renoir Bleu."

"Hospital of the Blue Renoir," Heward repeated. "What a strange idea."

The Colonel's smile was a far away one, for he was thinking once more of his friends and how pleased they would be. "But a perfect one," he said.

"I beg your pardon?" said Joel Heward. "I don't quite understand."

The Colonel did not explain.

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"There's an ethical way and an unethical way to watch birds, Beasley!"

MEANING OF FEAR

He had no nerves but the minutes before going down—were something special

BY JOHN FOSTER

WHEN they removed the blindfold, Jerry Blackthorne saw off to the east an oil-rig flare, snapping like a bright orange flag.

He grinned in the darkness. Despite his companions' elaborate precautions he knew where he was. Not two weeks ago he and Jensen had caught a string of speckled trout flare-fishing by that rig. He was on Bayou Bengal, near its entrance to Lost Lake.

"Shall we get on with it?"

Weller's voice was gentle, but his two cronies jumped from the boat as if he had barked at them. Slogging through the water they carried the air compressor to the bank.

Jerry, a big compactly-built man with the crewcut most divers wear, remained in the stern with the girl they called Leslie.

"Ready, Mr. Blackthorne?" Weller's cultured voice coming out of the darkness was as gentle as before, but again there was that undercurrent of command.

"In a minute," Jerry said easily, making no move, hearing with pleasure the girl's soft "Oh, oh." He reached over and patted her hand. Might as well let her know he didn't jump for anyone.

The two men returned and Jerry loaded them with his diving gear. He said to the girl, "Let's hit the beach," and went over the side into hip-deep water, then twisted to reach for her.

From the bank Weller said, "Wait. I'll carry—"

Jerry already had her in his arms.

The last thing he saw as he turned from the boat was the shotgun leaning against the gunwale.

He started to call the gun to the attention of Weller, who had said it was for snakes; instead, wading out of the water with Leslie in his arms, he said, "I trust you don't mind. I might as well have some fun if I'm going to do all the work."

Weller did not answer. He led the way up a low hillock, through thick cane. Jerry and the girl followed him while the others—a squat redhead named Collins and a ferret of a man

called Eddie—blundered behind them with the heavy gear.

"Why couldn't he be a skin diver like the other guy?" asked Collins of no one in particular, and no one answered.

What other guy? Jerry wondered.

"The place should be just beyond these oaks." Weller spoke as if going by a map, but he walked steadily. Atop the low slope he stopped, his thin figure black against the starless night, and for the first time snapped on his torch. "That's it," he said.

They stood on the edge of what appeared to be a moat or canal. Moving across the thick brown water, the beam of light touched on a mouldering brick wall upon which were what might have been dismounted cannon. Then the light clicked off.

"Let's set up the gear," Weller said crisply.

It looked to Jerry like an ancient fort. Back in his flat Weller had called it merely "an old place that's been sinking into the swamp for a hundred years or so under its own weight. Since the 1915 hurricane it's been practically inundated."

Going back and forth from New Orleans to the Gulf, Jerry had been passing within a hundred yards of it for years with no knowledge of its existence.

Weller snapped on the light again. Its beam moved carefully along the wall where a cracked arch barely showed above the water. "You enter through there," he said, and cut off the light.

Setting up his diving gear, Jerry felt sweat pop out on his palms. Nervousness, not nerves. He had no nerves. It was always like this before going down on a job. He had been diving for half of his thirty-six years—with the Navy, oil companies, salvage outfits. Always the minutes before going down were something special. He wondered what the job was.

When Weller—looking like a professor in his black suit and gold-rimmed spectacles—had approached him, Jerry had taken the offer without caring much about the details. With no salvage or other work in sight, plus his own taste for expensive living, the two hundred pounds Weller had offered had been too good to refuse.

Also there had been an air of mystery from the first: the girl Leslie and the way she looked at him; and Weller's polite refusal to let him know exactly what he was supposed to do.

Once he had agreed the mystery had developed. There was the blindfold, and there was the gun that Collins wore in a shoulder holster. Jerry had felt it when a lurch of the car had thrown them together.

Standing close to him as he set up the amplifier, the girl said, "Can't you hurry? These mosquitoes are eating me alive."

Jerry grinned at her. "Lucky mosquitoes." His right hand

was on the tender's speech knob, and without looking he turned it to maximum. At the same time he said to Weller, " My intercom isn't working. I got water in my helmet the last time I used it."

" Sloppy," said Collins.

" You think so? " asked Jerry.

" Be quiet, Collins," said Weller. " How will we communicate with you then, Mr. Blackthorne? "

" You can't by voice." Maybe this way, thought Jerry, he would find out what was going on. " When I get inside this place I'll give one pull on the lifeline. If I give two pulls I'll want more line. Three pulls mean start reeling me in. Don't worry about my air; I'll regulate that from below." He was struggling into his diving dress. " I'll need help with this."

" Oh, let me," said the girl.

" Collins," said Weller.

" He's a big boy," said Collins. " Let him dress himself."

But at Weller's firm command he laced up the legs of the diving dress, held the rubber cuffs open so Jerry could push his hands through. The air compressor engine was popping smoothly now. Jerry linked up the hose and blew air through the helmet.

" Once you get inside, Mr. Blackthorne," said Weller, " you turn right. Go through three galleries, with archways. You'll feel them. In the middle of the fourth turn left. Go thirty feet and there is a low opening in the wall. Go through that and in the left-hand corner nearest the opening, if my information is correct, there should be a pile of bowling balls. Bring them up."

Jerry paused in the midst of buckling on his diving shoes. " Bowling balls? "

A glint of starlight came through the overcast, touching Weller's spectacles. They seemed to fit into his face, eyes without pupils. " Something like that, Mr. Blackthorne."

" O.K., if that's what you want. Give me another bearing on that entrance, will you? " As Weller turned, he plugged the intercom wires into his helmet. " All right," he said.

He lifted his arms to help Collins and Eddie secure the breastplate to the suit. Then they screwed the helmet into place. Instinct told Jerry not to say anything to them about the safety-lock on the back of the helmet; it was left unfastened.

The faceplate was open. As he swung it shut, he heard the girl, Leslie, say, " Please be careful." He gave her a salute.

Apparently Weller directed Collins and Eddie to help him to the moat. Jerry shoved them away and walked with difficulty to the edge. He stepped off. Water slapped over his helmet and he was below. He followed the descending line to the bottom,

took a couple of turns of the lifeline around his arm and adjusted the control valve.

Jerry walked across the moat, going entirely by feel. He had no underwater light and could not have used it in this muddy water if he'd had one. But ninety per cent of his work had been done in complete darkness anyway.

He hit a mass of fallen masonry and debris and crawled up until he touched the wall. He followed its slimy surface to the entrance. Crawling inside, he gave one pull on the lifeline.

"He's inside!" Eddie's voice came faintly over the intercom.

"Big deal," said Collins.

His voice was louder. That meant Eddie was playing out the line and Collins was near the amplifier. But apparently he moved, and the voices after that were too faint to be understood.

Jerry walked in a crouch along what seemed to be a cracked stone floor. He barked his shins against something and bent over it. A cannon, he realised. So this was some kind of fort.

He went round the cannon, making a note that he had gone to his left to avoid fouling his lines on the return. His fingers felt an arch. The first gallery. He went through two more. At the next he turned left, felt the low opening, and ducked through.

He found the balls, a small pile of them, where Weller had said. He hefted one and promptly dropped it. Even under water it was so heavy he could carry only one at a time. He picked it up again, ducked through the opening and, giving three jerks on the line, began to retrace his steps.

For the first time he became conscious of a sound behind him.

A muffled thudding, like stealthy footsteps—it seemed to follow him from gallery to gallery but stopped when he crawled through the entrance.

He crossed the moat, found the descending line and shut off his exhaust valve. His suit swelled and he rose like a balloon to the surface.

When his helmet broke water he saw Weller crouched at the edge of the moat, his bony hands outstretched eagerly. Jerry put the heavy ball in them. Weller did not drop it.

Weller's face had changed; it had a strange, almost feral look. His lips moved, but the voice was inaudible. The girl's voice came over the intercom: "Is it, Paul? Is it . . .?"

Jerry descended. Now there was only the sound of air sobbing in his helmet. He crossed the moat and climbed into the fort.

Immediately the other sound, neither louder nor softer, closer nor farther away, began to dog his footsteps. He had no idea what it was, except that it was something beneath the surface close by. He got another ball and started back.

Above him the group had moved near the amplifier again. He heard Collins saying, " Damn it, Weller, tell us! Is . . .? "

" Be quiet! I'll tell you when I know."

There was silence. Jerry was almost at the exit when he heard the sigh, an exhalation of long-held breath and Weller saying, " Look! Look at that! "

And the girl: " Gold."

For a few moments it sounded like a bunch of drunks at a football match. Then Weller's voice again, thin and harsh: " Stop it, you fools! Somebody might be passing."

Collins said, " So the skin diver was doublecrossing us. He found 'em, and guessed what they were and . . ."

" Obviously," said Weller. " That's why we had to get rid of him."

" Pity. He looked such an innocent," said Collins. His voice had no pity. " Not like that blowhard down there now." There was a pause, then, " What if he finds the other guy's body? "

" He's nowhere near it. But if . . ." Weller moved away, his voice fading.

Jerry stood quite still.

Jensen, his mind was thinking. Tommy Jensen with whom he had been fishing not a fortnight ago. It couldn't be.

Yet it fitted. Jensen, the skin diver who was not nearly as innocent as he looked. And he had disappeared four days ago. There had been considerable talk about it in O'Brien's bar.

The sound like footsteps which had followed Jerry through the fort had stopped. Now, abruptly, it came again, louder, and he turned instinctively. But there was nothing to see, only darkness.

He found his way out of the exit—the sound again stopping immediately—crossed the moat and surfaced.

They were all at the brink, waiting for him. He passed up the ball and Weller put it beside him, speaking. Jerry opened his faceplate to hear.

" You took a long time this trip. Anything wrong? "

" Just being careful." He looked at them, trying to keep his own face from showing anything. The girl was smoking a cigarette. In the moonlight her face seemed thin and pale and beautiful. None of them looked like killers.

He said, " Is this the stuff you wanted? "

" Yes," said Weller. " How many are there? "

" Three more, I think."

" Right," said Weller, with a thin smile.

Jerry shut the faceplate and went down. Inside the fort the

strange sounds began again, but he was not thinking about them.

He was thinking of Weller's voice when he had first heard it on the telephone: "Are you interested in a job, Mr. Blackthorne? Diving, yes. Are you alone?" Weller and the girl had come to his flat, but when they left Jerry had been told to go ahead, alone, and get in the car with a redheaded man who would speak to him. The girl and Weller followed. So no one had seen them together. If he should disappear like Tommy Jensen there would be no way to connect him with them.

He heard Collins' voice, getting louder as he moved towards the amplifier. "He damn well knows these aren't bowling balls. If he talks the law will be down on us."

Weller said something and Collins replied, but inaudibly. Then, quite loudly, came Weller's voice, precise, prim.

"I don't like killing, Collins—not if it is avoidable."

Jerry was still moving. He got a ball, started back. A whiff of cigarette smoke came to his nostrils. So the girl was standing by the air intake of the compressor. Perhaps she had blown the smoke to him on purpose.

Jerry was used to the attentions of women. They thought the white scar that split one of his bushy eyebrows gave him a rugged look. They found the width of his shoulders, his air of utter competence, very male and attractive. And he in turn liked women. He wondered about the girl Leslie.

He had been quite sure from the start that this job probably had some illegal angles. They had made that clear from the way they had hired him. He also knew enough about the cut the law took from treasure trove to know why the gang was operating this way. But murder . . .

From some back corner of his brain the memory that had been nagging him came out: his history teacher saying bitterly, "Wars are won by guts, and brains, and above all money. And it was money the South lacked."

For a while, his teacher had said, a trickle of gold from Europe had held up the rickety financial structure of the South in the Civil War. A shipment had come to New Orleans just before the North captured the city in 1862. Unable to move it out, the South had hidden it. It had been the history teacher's opinion that some damn Northerner had found and appropriated it, since with the hiding it dropped from official records.

But suppose it had been taken to this fort? Suppose it had been melted down to look like cannonballs, painted over and left—and suppose the men who had left it were later killed? Somehow, somewhere, Weller might have stumbled on the official report of the hiding.

That was only one explanation. There could be others. The balls might have been here since the time of the pirate Laffite. But, however they got here, he had seen Weller's face as he reached for them, had heard the girl's whispered " Gold! "

Men killed for gold. Jerry could understand that theoretically. But not in cold blood, he thought. Not even Weller. " I don't like killing—if it is avoidable." All you have to do, Jerry told himself, is to make it avoidable.

He was at the exit now. He had forgotten the following sound until it stopped. He noted that, and forgot it again, moving across the moat. He surfaced and handed over the ball. Weller was saying something, but Jerry did not want to open the faceplate. He did not want Weller looking straight into his eyes, not when he was in the water and helpless. He descended.

When he climbed back into the fort the footsteps started again . . . like echoes of his own steps, only that was impossible. He stopped. Behind him, the steps kept on, marking time it seemed. Or getting closer? He could not be sure.

He made his way again to the treasure store and picked up a ball. Only one more after this. One more and then—

He felt a light tap on his shoulder.

He jumped and almost yelled. Ahead of him there was a crashing noise. The ball slipped from his hands. Now, suddenly, there were thuds all round him.

As he picked up the ball again something hit his hand, cutting it. He said " Damn! " without knowing he had spoken aloud. He knew now what the sounds were. His air bubbles were creating a disturbance and the rotten old fort was falling in around him piece by piece. At any moment it might come down in a heap.

He began to go faster. Get this ball out. Maybe he could lie about there being another. No, that was what Tommy Jensen had done. Weller knew the number, had known all along, and he himself had confirmed it.

Ahead he saw what looked like a pillar leaning at a slight angle from roof to floor. It was moonlight shining down through the water from a hole that had not been there before. This must have been the heavy crash. He walked round the pale shaft of light as if it had been solid stone. The floor under it would be covered with rubble where he might slip and cut his suit.

Behind him now it seemed as if a series of doors were being slammed. The pieces were getting bigger. He could see the pale blob of the exit: the moon must be completely clear now. Get this ball out and—

He was jerked backward, almost falling. He struggled to go ahead but was held fast.

No, he thought, hearing the steady choom of the falling masonry. Dying was never nice, but to die like this . . .

" Easy," he said. " Take it easy, boy."

He had fouled his line round the cannon. He went back and walked the other way to free it. He realised he had been holding his breath. He expelled it and several more pieces of the roof promptly fell around him.

" Are you all right? " Weller's voice was sharp.

" I'm all right," said Jerry, " only—" and stopped. You fool, he thought, you damn fool. You've torn it now. Weller had obviously figured out the amplifier's complex system of knobs and switches.

" Hullo, hullo," he said in a desperate attempt to recoup. " Can you hear me up there, Weller? Your voice just came over the intercom. It must be working again."

There was a long silence. Then softly, almost regretfully, Weller said, " I see."

" Weller—"

" Bring the balls up," said Weller. " We'll talk about it."

" All right." He knew the kind of talking: the last ball passed up and he still in the water, helpless, trapped between the collapsing fort and the gun on the bank. He had his diver's knife—but what good was that? Maybe if he could get out of the water, out of his suit, he might have a chance.

And he knew they would never give him that chance.

He stood in the exit and felt his body begin to shake. Fear ran through him in shuddering waves and he could not stop it. The ball slipped out of his hands, hit and rolled. He did not know where. He did not care. He went down on all fours, not to search but because his knees would no longer hold him. Gradually he became conscious of the pull on the line.

" Mr. Blackthorne? " Weller called. " Mr. Blackthorne, bring those balls up. You can't stay down there."

Don't I know it. He was fighting the panic inside him as he might have fought another man. And he held it finally. He said, " This old fort is falling apart, Weller. Another ten minutes and the whole thing is coming down. So I'm leaving one ball here and going back for the other before it's too late. And I want my share of it, too." Greed, he thought. That was something Weller ought to understand.

After a pause, Weller said, " All right. But hurry."

He gave two jerks on the line and felt it give. He turned back into the fort. The sounds came from all round him now.

A chunk of masonry hit his shoulder so hard he staggered.

When he came to the shaft of light, he climbed the pile of fallen bricks. Directly under the hole he turned off his exhaust valve and shot to the surface. The momentum carried him head and shoulders above the water. He snatched at the edge of the hole, clung to it, clawing for a crack. Nails tore, but his fingers held. He got one leg over the edge.

He lay panting, staring up at the moon. When he could move, when he got on hands and knees he saw there was a wall between him and Weller's group. To his left was the ruin of an ancient barracks, overgrown with brush.

Even with the safety-lock unattached it was hard to get the helmet off, but he managed it. He kicked off his boots, and untied the lacing on the back of his legs.

Out of the suit, he screwed the helmet in place, slipped the knife from its scabbard. Then he gave three jerks on the line and dropped the suit back in the water. Let 'em puzzle over that, he thought, crawling along the wall.

At the far end, he put the knife between his teeth and climbed down the wall. He slipped without a splash into the moat. Behind him he could hear Weller calling into the amplifier.

Suddenly he was mad. He saw himself getting the shotgun from the boat and coming up behind the group as they hovered on the edge of the moat, pulling in the empty diving suit. He saw himself taking the pistol from Collins and throwing it in the water, and then taking his hands . . .

It was a beautiful picture, but even as he thought of it he knew it was not what he was going to do. It was what he would have done half an hour ago. Not now. All he wanted to do now was get in the boat, get the motor going, get away.

Weller and Collins and Eddie—the girl too—would keep if the mosquitoes did not finish them off. Let the police have any glory that went with the capture. And the danger too.

The shotgun was still in the boat. He did not touch it. He cut the anchor line, pushed the boat towards deep water, and let it drift. He waited until clouds covered the moon, then started the motor.

Almost immediately Collins began to shoot. Although Jerry was beyond the range of accurate shooting he ducked behind the engine-box. I guess I learnt something, he thought, still crouched although the shots had stopped. Maybe it was the thing he had always wondered about in the minutes before diving.

He tried to put it into words but it would not come clear; it was a kind of humility, he thought. The humility of fear.

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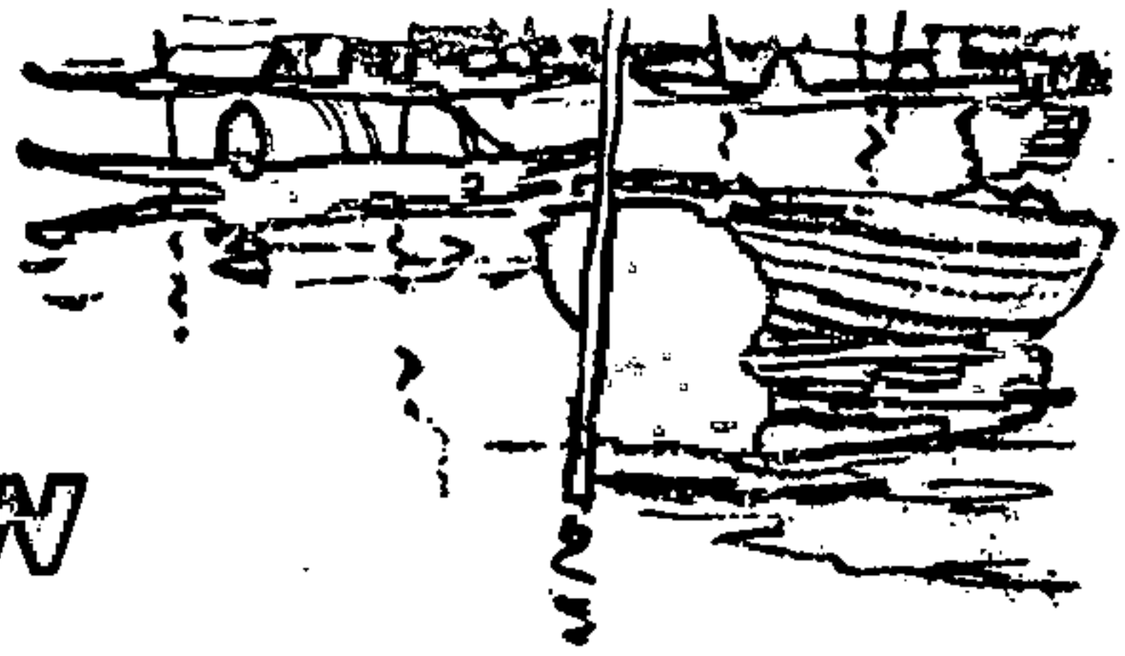
By
Gerald
Sparrow



The Golden Orchid

NICOLE stifled a cry and turned to speak to the man again but, as if anticipating this, he hobbled away with incredible celerity to vanish in the crowd. Clutching the scrap of paper he had handed her, Nicole reached the car door, held open by her servant.

On the drive back her heart was beating unbearably, for this man in rags, who begged for alms as the cinema disgorged its patrons, was her American lover, John D., the escaped prisoner—whom she had thought dead—now back in Bangkok.

Once in Sathorn House she ran upstairs to her bathroom, locked the door, and unfolded the scrap of paper. Then she read, *The end is coming. It is said that you have become the mistress of the Japanese General, Shiro Tanaka. If you do not wish to share his fate and be charged with war crimes, find out the exact disposition of all Japanese forces in Thailand and send this information through Nang Prik within a week.* The note was signed, *John D.*

Nicole memorised every word of the message. Then she burnt it in a saucer. The ashes she put in the water closet to vanish as she flushed it. Then she washed the saucer.

She passed through the two doors to her bedroom and knelt down to pray. Opening her heart to Buddha she said that she had been sorely tempted and had fallen into evil ways. But now the man she loved was still alive. That changed everything. She prayed for strength to obey John D. and do his bidding as a leader of the Seri Thai, the free Thai underground movement. Courage came to her. Looking into the months that lay ahead she was not afraid, but knew that she must take extraordinary care.

Nicole turned over in her mind the whole bizarre position in which she found herself. In her heart she knew that she loved no-one but John D. who had been her lover when she was "a golden orchid," one of the dancing partners at the Golden Palm club before the Japanese Occupation.

Now she had been raised up by General Tanaka to a position of considerable influence and back-verandah power in Siam. She was above the law, the Siamese law. No police officer dared touch her, and no warrant would ever be made out by the Siamese for her arrest.

The only power to which she was subject was the power of Shiro Tanaka, striking through the Kempei Thai, the dreaded Japanese secret police. He could order her arrest, interrogation and torture at any moment. In these days he was suspicious of everyone who was not Japanese.

The very air of Siam which for three years had appeared to be warm and congenial, seemed now to smell of treachery. The General began to dislike and distrust the Siamese. Behind their politeness and genuflecting, ingratiating manners he thought he could read derision in their eyes.

But how could that be? The vast Japanese Empire was still intact. In China Chiang Kai Shek had withdrawn to his mountain

fortress. China had been Japanned. Only in the Philippines and in Siam was there trouble. A free Thai slogan had even been daubed on the gate of Sathorn House.

Nicole knew just what Shiro Tanaka was thinking. She knew what made him have nightmares and cry out at night. There was a feeling of doom in the air which was not explicable by the known facts of the war situation.

When General Tanaka came back from the north he was in no better frame of mind, but he seemed to need Nicole more than ever. She gave herself to him as she had always done, playing her part of the Japanese wife, but adding her own touches of provocation and individuality that delighted him. At dinner on the night of his return, he said to her, "When I was away I received a letter about you."

"A letter, Shiro? What did it say?"

"It said, 'Beware of the kitten in your house. She can scratch.'"

Nicole laughed, "All the girls are jealous of me, my lord."

Shiro looked at her with his hard stare. "That is what I think. It is some silly girl who wants to get you out of here. I burnt the letter. I have more important things to think about. Tonight we have a meeting here of my staff. Please see that we are undisturbed. It may take a long time."

"Of course, I will see to supper; everything . . ."

At first Nicole doubted whether she could ever do what John D. had ordered. Clearly he was very angry with her, but of this she was glad. She argued that he would only be angry if he still loved her. Nicole had made up her mind. She would do everything that John D. and the Seri Thai asked her to do. Thus might she win him back.

She summoned Nang Prik to massage her that night, saying that there was no need for her to come in the morning. When Nang Prik had done her work, Nicole said, "Old woman, tell the man Surit that I will try to do as he asks. And, Nang Prik—"

"Yes, your ladyship."

"When you next come, bring me some opium from the shop. The General has pains in his stomach all the time. I will try to help him."

Nang Prik nodded her head.

"Here is the money. Go now."

Nicole had devised a plan for looking through Shiro's papers undisturbed. He was in the habit of drinking wine just before retiring, in the hope that he would achieve untroubled sleep. Nicole thought that, if she put opium into his wine, he would sleep until morning and not stir. From his key chain she could extract the key of his bureau and read the private papers she knew he kept there. Whether these would include what she sought, the Japanese dispositions, she did not know, but it was worth trying. Nicole now could not only speak Japanese, she could read it; and this meant that she could understand the gist of the papers.

The plan worked. She managed to mix the opium with the red wine, and within minutes Shiro was in deep, untroubled sleep. She took the key from his chain and slipped downstairs to his study, opened his desk, and very carefully went through his papers. She dared not turn on the electric lights of the room in case the sentries, who passed and repassed each other as they encircled the house, should see the light and enter. She used a minute Japanese torch that she could conceal within the bureau.

She was going to shut the bureau in despair and failure when, at the bottom of a bundle of official documents, she saw a sheet of paper with that day's date on which Shiro had made notes. At once she knew that this was what she was looking for. She made a hurried pencil note of the information: Bangkok, 2nd and 36th Division, understrength, 32,000 men. Malayan border, Songkhla. Artillery and infantry, 25,000 men and supplies. Based on Pakmampoh, Utaradit, Chongmai. Phrae 10,000 each approximately, 40,000 men resting. See draft on exchanges with war front.

Nicole replaced each paper with meticulous care. Then she locked the bureau, and seconds later was sleeping by Shiro's side.

The next visit of Nang Prik alarmed Nicole, for the old woman said, "You are to go this afternoon to this address if you have what the master wants." Nang Prik smiled slyly. She still thought that she was acting as go-between in some clandestine love affair.

The address which was written in block capitals was THE VILLA, TA PRACHAN. At first Nicole could not understand this. It was the house that faced the river adjoining our internment camp. It was the private residence of Pridi Panomyong, the Regent. How dare he be so bold? Was he harbouring John D. and the Seri Thai in his house? But Nicole had her information, and late that afternoon her car drew up outside the Regent's house. A sentry on guard saluted, and her car was allowed to drive in and park. A servant showed her into a large room overlooking the river.

Nicole must have waited half an hour. She was not accustomed to waiting now. People waited for her. Then a door at the far end of the room opened. She expected the Regent to confront her, but the man who came across the room was John D. Nicole felt as if she must faint, but she contrived to keep her control. It was her first meeting with him since his "cremation" and escape from the internment camp.

John D. was not a beggar now, but was not in uniform either. He was dressed in shirt and cotton trousers. He looked hard and fit. He wasted no time.

"Nicole, I do not know why you betrayed me. No doubt you had your reasons. Perhaps for you there was no other way than to become Tanaka's mistress. But now, if I am to save you, you must do what I say. You understand?"

Nicole nodded. She could not bring herself to speak.

"Have you got the information we asked for?"

"I have it here."

John D. read the paper she handed him. "But this is exactly what we need. Are you sure of this?"

"I took it from his note of yesterday. I am sure . . ."

"You have done well. Now you must obey my orders. This man Tanaka. We may decide to kill him, or we may let him live. In any case he will be brought to justice. You must go back to him now. Live as you have been living, observe all you can, and report to us through Nang Prik. She can be relied on. Surit, too. If Tanaka receives letters from Tokyo, try to see them before he takes them to his office."

"I will do as you say, but about us? What are you going to do? Do you hate me now?"

John D. hesitated. Then he came over and kissed her.

"I do not hate you, Nicole. You have been brave. You will need courage. In the end I could tell them that you have rendered a service, a service that blots out the past."

Nicole wept when she heard this, but her weeping was the outward sign of her relief. The Japanese vice that had held her for three years no longer meant anything to her. If John D. did not hate her, she had something to live for. Life could be real again. The nightmare of Shiro would become a thing of the past.

She flung her arms around him and ran to her car. For the first time since the arrest of John D. she was nearly happy. At least she had hope and a purpose for living.

Nicole was immeasurably assufed when Shiro took his medicine each night. More and more he would depend on his glass of drugged wine for solace and peace. She did not try to get him to increase the dosage. That was not necessary. Once in the vice, he would need a little more each month to achieve the sense of bliss he was now procuring so easily. Shiro was able to carry out his duties as efficiently as ever, in fact more efficiently, for his chronic stomach trouble disappeared, and he had a great feeling of well-being.

Nicole, without taking any further steps, was able to increase her power over him. As the terror increased outside Sathorn House, within its walls she reigned supreme, giving him peace and a retreat from the ghastly realities of a war that must be lost.

Shiro now took Nicole into his confidence more and more. He told her that all was not well. There were persistent rumours that the British, under General Slim, were about to land at Songkhla. The garrison there had been increased. As soon as Nicole learnt this she relayed the news to John D. through Nang Prik and Major Surit. The chain of information was now functioning smoothly and effortlessly. The Allied Information chiefs had reason to be grateful to Nicole, for she represented a most reliable source of information in Bangkok. Nicole learnt the big moves before anyone else.

In August, 1945, in the midst of the rains, Nicole had a feeling that major moves were being discussed. The meetings of Tanaka with his Staff Officers became much more frequent and were

held at Sathorn House in the greatest secrecy. No word leaked out as to their purpose, but Shiro dropped a hint to Nicole. At dinner one night he said, "We may have to take over, Nicole, but that will not affect you in any way."

Nicole said nothing, but she sent the information to John D. Tanaka, Nicole felt, was loath to take this final step. It was, in a way, an admission of failure.

Towards the end of the month John D. summoned her again. He was in American uniform now. As soon as she saw this, Nicole knew that the end must be very near; yet, outside, nothing had altered. The Seri Thai were still a hunted underground, the nearest Allied troops seven hundred miles away in Burma.

"Nicole, you have to do something now that may offend you. Shiro must die. This is not my decision, though it causes me no grief. And you are the one who must kill him. Here is the means." He handed her a small packet of grey powder. "He will die slowly but without much pain. If there is a post mortem, they will say it was his stomach ulcers that killed him."

Nicole stood dumbfounded. "How can I do this? He has been good to me in his way. Let Nang Prik do it—the cook—anyone, but not me."

"It is not my order, Nicole. You are the one chosen. There is no one else on whom we can absolutely rely. You must do as I say."

Nicole nodded. "It is terrible; but if I must, I must."

"Wait until we give you the signal. I will tell you through Nang Prik when you must kill him. Keep this well hidden till that day."

"I understand and will do as you say."

The next week was a week of torment for Nicole.

Then one day Tanaka returned unexpectedly to lunch, and his face was flushed with anger.

"Do you know who is back in Bangkok, Nicole?"

"I hear little, Shiro. Tell me."

"The American. The man they call John D. He was your lover, was he not, before the war? Now he heads the Seri Thai here, and they are getting very bold." Tanaka clenched his fist in passion. "But I will destroy him. My men can smell him out. If he runs like a rat from hole to hole we shall follow him until we catch him, and burn him till he wishes he had never been born."

But Nicole merely answered, "This is not my business, Shiro."

From that moment a deadly duel developed between Shiro Tanaka, who had all the cards in his hand, and John D. the young American, still in hiding. And the fierceness of the battle was embittered by the fact that because of Nicole the two men hated each other, though they had never met.

It was uncanny how the atmosphere of Bangkok changed, even in the Ta Prachan prison, where I still lived through the monotonous days.

In the last year, as the summer of 1945 passed into the rains of autumn, everything started to change. The collapse of the third Reich following the collapse of Italy, made it inevitable that one day Japan would herself suffer defeat. The Japanese, of course, would not admit this for a moment, and they could point to the war map that showed them still as masters of Asia. Moreover there were whole Japanese divisions who had not yet been thrown into the fight. The Japanese, dedicated and experienced, were still very dangerous.

We heard a great deal of what was happening on the grapevine of the camp. It was said that we had a receiving-set in the building, but the Siamese Commandant's office were as excited by the war news as we were and they managed to let us know as each new turn of fortune developed. It was the change in the attitude of the Siamese that had been most striking. Until now they had cringed and crawled to their Japanese " allies." Now they stood erect again.

I was able to follow the fortunes of Nicole, and the duel that developed towards the end between Tanaka and John D., because during the last year Nicole resumed her weekly visits to the camp. I was always able to talk to her, and she told me the whole story.

Nicole was no longer a very young girl. She was twenty-one, a woman, and a woman who at an early age had tasted great power.

When John D. was smuggled back into Bangkok with the first spearhead of the Seri Thai, Nicole was shocked into a full realisation of her position. Had she become a treacherous little Eurasian whore? She faced this charge which she formulated against herself, and determined that the answer should be: no. I suppose this led to the renewal of her camp visits. It was a step that required courage, but then Nicole never lacked courage. She believed in her own star absolutely. She believed in her own wit, and beauty, and cunning, and it looked as if this confidence she had in her own powers might carry her through.

She was beautifully dressed now in white shantung suits that were superbly cut, and she wore the jewellery that Shiro had given her—a diamond ring and ear-rings of very fine quality, brilliant without any of those green-blue tinges that are apt to disfigure Eastern stones; and a star sapphire of monstrous size and great lustre which she wore on the fourth finger of her left hand. She went everywhere in her cream-and-crimson car with a chauffeur and a bodyguard and she still smoked her small cigars, the only woman in Siam to do so, as far as I could remember. She was a formidable personality now, accustomed to command. Yet, with me, on her visits to Ta Prachan, she would revert to her old charm and youthfulness, and be as gay and as indiscreet as she had been four long years ago when she had first come over to my table at the Golden Palm.

It was clear that she was still deeply in love with John D. Since his return he had had no time for love. He was a hunted saboteur,

an underground rat that Tanaka's men would have killed without mercy. She knew that her prospects were bleak if peace came and she was still the mistress of Shiro, but I do not think that it was fear that compelled her to become the queen-pin of Seri Thai activities in the closing hectic months. It was the love she had for John D. that had never been quenched, that had never deserted her, that she had, in her manner, cherished through the nightmare years.

I wondered to myself how it was possible for a woman like Nicole to play her great love charade with Tanaka and at the same time keep her love for John D. alive and warm. I felt that the answer was hidden deep in her nature and upbringing and, to some extent, deep in the nature of all women.

Nicole, in spite of being half French, was very Siamese in her responses and outlook. Centuries of submission to authority, to the Chow Chiwit—the Lord of Life—had made Siamese women accept the reigning monarch of the day without questioning. To be the " wife " of the man in power was the glittering prize that Siam always held out to its young women. When Nicole had been offered that prize, she grasped it, for she could not bear any other woman to have what she could obtain. In her mind this had very little or nothing to do with John D. He was the lover of her secret heart. He would always be so. She could act her part on the great stage and, as the curtain descended, she could run to her lover waiting in the wings. That seemed to Nicole the inevitable way to play the cards that fate placed in her beautiful, flexible hands.

The Siamese never broke under Japanese aggression and oppression. They bent so far, but they retained, even in the darkest years, that thread of being a nation with a soul of its own. Just as Nicole, the little daughter of Siam, retained her link with Buddha, and the love in her heart for John D.

I was sure that, in envisaging her philosophy in these terms I had arrived at the truth. I think she sensed this and knew that I understood and had some sympathy. This is what induced her to come and see me so often, to tell me the whole story. It was a link with that other world to which she hoped one day to return . . .

It was in the middle of September that she made her last visit to me in the prison camp. I think I recall the day quite clearly, even now, because it was the first day we heard rumours, very vague rumours, that the end was coming.

It was a steamy day in the middle of the rains. The sun had risen over the Menam in its strength in the morning making the Japanese destroyers, that still rode at anchor opposite our prison, gleam and glint in its rays. But about noon it started to rain, not torrentially, but slowly, like English rain in June, yet persistently, as if Buddha knew that the parched rice fields needed the blessing of water.

As the rain came the Menam started to be shrouded in mist so that the rice tugs that chuffed along the river could be heard before they were seen. I had grown to love the old brown river that gave life and hope to the Siamese people.

The visitors were not allowed to come before two, and they had all to leave by four for, at five, a member of the Japanese Supervising Committee inspected the prison, or, if he was too busy to do this, had a word with the Siamese Commandant, to assure himself that none of the Anglo-American monsters had escaped.

We were allowed now to meet visitors outside the camp gate in an annexe of the Commandant's office.

On this Friday I went out with the other prisoners on the stroke of two, but there was no Nicole. I waited and waited, but still there was no sign of her. I had the most disturbing imaginings. Perhaps she had been caught. Perhaps Tanaka had discovered her activities for the underground. Perhaps she was at this moment bound and gagged in Saladaeng House, having the acid treatment about which she had told me . . . It was quite possible; in fact it was not unlikely.

At that moment her cream-and-red car tore up to the entrance. She was driving—alone. No chauffeur, no bodyguard. I thought this very strange. What did it mean?

We sought a quiet corner, and in a whisper she told me her news.

" Gerald, Shiro knows where John D. is. The Seri Thai H.Q. was moved last week to a room above a locksmith in Sampeng. The name of the locksmith, a Chinese, is Yu Fong. At six tonight Shiro's men will surround the place, and John D. and all the leaders will be arrested. I go now to warn them. But I shan't be able to return to Sathorn House. I shall have to ask the Regent for sanctuary. So far the Japanese have never dared to enter his house. As you know, it is not a hundred yards from these gates. If Shiro seeks me there I can slip away by sampan either across the river to the Navy, or come here where you must smuggle me into hiding. We are told there are only a few days more of war. I do not want to die, but I must warn him. I come to tell you what is going on."

I looked at my watch. It was five past four. " Nicole, get there without wasting a moment. Shiro may send his men early. And get away instantly or they will see you . . ."

" Yes, I will do. I was waiting for word from John D. to kill Shiro. They are holding back. Now I wish I had done it on my own. You may see me again very soon."

So saying, she ran to her waiting car and roared off in the direction of the market and Sampeng.

As the gates were closing for the day, I slipped in, the last prisoner to return. The news that Nicole had brought was anxious, disturbing news. If the rumour was true and the war was in its last days it would be horrifying for all the Seri Thai leaders to be tortured and killed just before victory. And Nicole would certainly share their fate. But I realised that this might well happen.

That night a low mist shrouded the river, but a waxing young moon in its first quarter was rising serenely over Bangkok Noi.

It made it possible to discern the Japanese destroyers that no longer gleamed, but looked like lean, grim ghosts.

I must have slept for a couple of hours huddled up in my blanket, when I woke with a sense of urgent unease. I sat up straight away and peered at the river bank. A large sampan was approaching our bank. I looked again. It moored alongside. At any moment I expected a searchlight from one of the destroyers to open up and gunfire to blast these quiet visitors, but there was no movement from the Japanese. A man leapt out of the prow of the boat and gave his hand to a girl who followed him. After them seven more men sprang quickly and quietly on to the bank. They must have had wire-cutters, for in no time they were within the camp, having given their sampan a push into the current that carried it out of sight. The party halted for a moment while one of their number stooped, apparently repairing the cut wire. Then silently, in single file, the party disappeared into the interior of the prison camp.

My heart leapt painfully, for by the soft light of the young moon I had recognised the man who first came ashore and the girl who followed him. The man was John D. and the girl I could never mistake. It was Nicole, with whom I had talked only yesterday.

The Seri Thai had taken refuge in Ta Prachan.

There was no indication on that Sunday morning that followed the quiet arrival of the Seri Thai in the prison that anything had altered. There was no sign of our silent visitors.

The Padre, who had assisted so innocently and convincingly at the " cremation " of John D., held his early morning communion at eight o'clock as usual. He held his morning service at eleven and took as the text for his sermon, designedly or not I do not know, a passage from Isaiah which ended with the words, " The Lord will deliver his people from their bondage."

It was not until the afternoon that the rumours started to circulate.

We, the prisoners, had become connoisseurs of rumour. These rumours that so agitated the internees emanated, it was said, directly from the Commandant's office.

The first was that the Japanese, under the direct command of General Tanaka, were going to swoop on the camp to smell out saboteurs and traitors and to deal ferociously with any caught—and with their friends and helpers.

The second rumour, only slightly less powerful than the first, was that General Slim's men had broken through the Japanese lines in Burma and, after the most bloody battle, were making directly for the capital, their first mission being our liberation.

It was around four that a third rumour joined the two that had been circulating all day. The Seri Thai, it was said, were waiting in an upper bedroom of C Building, unoccupied since its inmate had died of malaria.

I decided to check this rumour myself. Room 16 was like all

the others in the long passage, a wooden box about nine feet by nine. It was empty. There was no sign of the Seri Thai. And still the Japanese did not come.

At five o'clock, when the sun in Siam starts to relent, we were diverted by a ceremony taking place over our southern fence. The Regent, Pridi Panomyong, as Rector of the University of Moral and Political Science, was handing out degrees at the end of the academic year. There must have been over a thousand students waiting to witness the ceremony, each dressed identically in white suit and black alpaca gown. A few minutes after five Pridi entered, wearing his black gown with its red trimmings. He was followed by the University staff, mainly Siamese, but with quite a number of Europeans, neutral friends who had come to see the ceremony at the invitation of the Rector.

It was, in its way, quite a touching little ceremony. One by one the students came up, kneeling to receive their diploma degrees. Each time the stocky figure of the Rector leaned forward to hand the degree to the young man or woman. Each time he smiled and said a few words of encouragement.

I got out an old pair of binoculars that somehow had survived the hazards of war and scrutinised the students, the Rector, and his guests. Then I knew why room 16 was deserted. Anticipating the Japanese swoop on Ta Prachan, the seven Seri Thai, with John D. and Nicole, had been infiltrated into the crowds over the fence. I could pick them out clearly now. John D. had reverted more or less to his beggar's costume and was a coolie waiting to " clear up " when the show was over. His followers were among the Rector's guests, including Danes and French teachers. Nicole was there among the students—fourth from the right of the seventh row, dressed in the black gown that gave her anonymity. She was waiting apparently to receive her " degree." I was riveted to where I stood. It was unbearably moving if one realised the peril in which all these people stood.

Eventually her turn came and she walked out of her rank, " weid," received her diploma. As she returned to stand in the waiting crowd, another student took her place.

It was then that, with a reverberating crash, a Japanese armoured car drove through the camp gates. It was followed by two lorry loads of troops and a jeep. In the jeep was General Tanaka, and with him were two Staff Officers.

Those of us who were watching the ceremony at Ta Prachan ran from the fence. The last thing we wished to do was to draw attention to what was going on next door.

The Japanese were clearly out to inspire terror. The men came in with fixed bayonets. A stray pariah dog that had been made a pet of by the prisoners was speared on a bayonet and thrown high into the air. It dropped shrieking. The men stationed themselves at each of the four corners of the camp. Each squad had a machine-gun. We were herded into a suffocating group in the middle of the compound, just over four hundred of us now, for most of the

women had been repatriated. A small daïs was quickly erected and General Tanaka mounted it. He spoke in English, the Siamese Commandant by his side.

"Your lives have been spared through the clemency of the Japanese authorities and our Siamese allies, although you have no right to live. Now I learn you have been harbouring saboteurs and criminals who have been sent into Siam by the Anglo-American monsters. This cannot be tolerated. You will tell me within five minutes where these men are or I will give my men orders to shoot you down. The time starts from now."

The Padre spoke to Tanaka assuring him that no prisoner knew where the Seri Thai were. The General brushed him aside. "You lie, priest," he said. After four minutes during which no prisoner stirred, Tanaka raised his right hand for all his men to see. It was clear that at the end of the last minute he would drop it, and the massacre would commence.

The following seconds were the most agonising I ever lived through. The Seri Thai were very near us and in some force, but they were unarmed, or weren't they?

I imagine that forty seconds of that minute must have passed before we heard the roar of the bombers. They were coming in very low, just over the treetops. I could see their bomb hatches open as they started their attack.

A shout went up from the internees. These were British bombers and their immediate objective seemed to be the two runways that went down to the river on either side of the camp.

The Japanese destroyers opened fire, but the planes were flying too low for the trajectory of the guns on the destroyers' decks. It was a fierce sustained attack, and bombs began to fall and explode within the camp compound, in the University grounds, as well as on the two adjoining runways and fences.

Tanaka and his men dashed for cover, and as if by blind instinct the prisoners ran wildly out of the great prison gate that the Japanese armoured car had smashed. Over the fence the ceremony broke up in confusion. The Rector, his staff, and the students ran to the shelter of the buildings.

I ran through the gates and turned right, jumped the fence over into the "Wang Na museum," and crawled on towards the protective wall of the Grand Palace.

The bombing was getting heavier every moment, and I could see the students running helter skelter across the Premane ground. I must have crouched there for ten minutes before a voice said, "Gerald, come with us."

It was John D., and with him was Nicole. Both were extraordinarily cool. Nicole smiled.

John D. said, "Let's get to hell out of this." He was still dressed in rags, but over his tattered shirt and trousers he wore a thin raincoat. It must have made him unbearably hot, but it did give him an unremarkable appearance.

The bombing was gradually diminishing. The attack had lasted

nearly thirty minutes and been sustained throughout. Now the planes were wheeling away, and one could hear the roar of their engines as they gained height, dodging the Japanese shrapnel as they did so.

Almost opposite the Ministry of Defence, John D. did something so unexpected that it left me speechless. He hailed a taxi. The man was still sheltering inside his cab and he came out very reluctantly but, seeing a " farang " and the prospect of a tip, he started up his engine and said in Siamese, " Nai, pai nai? "

Nicole directed him in his own language to an address in Petchaburi Road. At last we had time to talk. It was a fantastic sensation being whirled through the streets of Bangkok again while Japanese troops thronged the pavements.

" What on earth are you going to do now? Is it true what I hear, that Slim's men are on the way? "

John D. gave my questions that moment of considered thought that was typical of him. " Why, yes. The British should be here tomorrow afternoon—the first airlift, that is. Seen this? " He handed me a page from a Japanese-converted newspaper. A passage in the news columns was marked in red pencil. It read:

An atomic device of unprecedented power was exploded by enemy planes over the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki yesterday morning. It is feared that the death roll is large. The cities were destroyed.

" My God, what does it mean? "

" It means Japanese surrender . . ."

Nicole said very quietly, " Yes, but we have to live through tonight and tomorrow morning . . . Tanaka will hunt us now. He does not care any more. He will kill John D. if he can; and he will torture me, even if he has to hang for it."

" Where are we going now? "

" To an empty house in Petchaburi Road. We may be safe there for a few hours, then we must move again if there is any sign that they suspect the house. Here, take this gun."

He gave me a revolver from under his coat. Nicole said she already had one tucked into her blouse. John D. was armed himself. We would not be so easy to take.

The driver was ordered to stop outside the house. John D. paid him. " We can only hope that he does not suspect and go straight to the nearest police station. Take the car number, 7089." He wrote it down.

Within minutes we were safely inside.

We ate from the larder of the house. There was whisky there and Nicole wanted each of us to have a stiff drink, but John D. would not allow it. " Cold stone sober is best," he said, " for staying alive." Nicole grimaced and poured the drink back into the bottle.

" Stay here, Nicole, while Gerald and I reconnoitre."

We looked out on Petchaburi Road. A car was standing almost opposite the gates. It was taxi number 7089 . . .

" I don't like that. Looks to me as if he has informed on us and

next month . . .

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is waiting for the Japanese to arrive. We'd better scram while we can."

We ran back to get Nicole and slipped through the rear gate of the house into a market garden. We were just in time for, as we did so, Japanese jeeps roared up the drive, men sprang out, and the house was surrounded.

I had just time to see that the Japanese were using dogs, police dogs, who ran baying into the house.

We fled, Nicole being as quick and active as we were. Dodging through the plantation, we came out in the garden of the Golden Palm. I could see the great Golden Palm still mushrooming out of the dance floor as we passed. We crossed the main road near Sapatum police station—and listened.

For several moments we could hear nothing and then, faintly, but each minute a little louder, we heard the dogs . . . Then we knew that Tanaka, mad for revenge, was using his last hours of freedom to hunt us through the city, hoping his dogs would tear us down so that we could be shot without inquiry. It was a terrifying and unforgettable experience.

A bus drew up. Nicole asked the driver where he was going. The man replied, " Dhonburi."

It was a stroke of luck. Dhonburi was that small portion of Bangkok which was across the Menam and included Bangkok Noi. It was also the home of such units of the Siamese Fleet as were stationed in the capital—and the Royal Siamese Navy had never been such eager allies of the Japanese as the Army had become. Moreover Dhonburi was seven miles away.

But the hunt was on, and we were the hunted. We did not know yet whether there would be a kill or not.

The bus sped on at a gratifying speed, the driver seemed to be keeping his foot well down on the accelerator. At stops the passengers were hustled out and swept in with great dispatch and it almost seemed as if the driver and the conductor were on our side, for we were over the Menam Chow Phya Bridge in under twenty minutes. Close to the Dhonburi roundabout the bus halted at its station. It was the terminus, and we sprang out.

As we did so the conductor whispered to me in Siamese, " Pom mai poed, nai."

I think that never since have I been so glad to hear any kind of message. Translated literally, the words meant, " I will not talk, sir." But they meant much more than that. The use of the polite pronoun " pom " and the word " nai " meant that this man was on our side.

I shook his hand, and the three of us took the southern road that led along the river bank to the units of the Siamese Fleet.

John D. was the first to speak. " Two-thirds of the officers stationed there are with us. If we can reach them, they will either smuggle us into a ship or conceal us."

He spoke too soon. I shall never know how Tanaka picked up our trail so quickly. As we walked along the river road, we spotted

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a convoy of Japanese jeeps racing over the Memorial Bridge, their sirens shrieking. Tanaka was now in the leading jeep.

We ran, the three of us, as fast as Nicole could run, for the shelter of the Siamese Naval Headquarters. Reaching the guarded door, John D. asked the guard for Captain Sanoh. The man saluted and asked us to come in and wait.

Two minutes later Sanoh appeared. He was a dapper young Naval officer. He needed no explanation, but said, "There is not a moment to spare. Follow me quickly." By the water's edge was a wharf and landing stage. The young Captain led us into a large shed covered with corrugated iron. It was full of ship's supplies.

"Hide among all this stuff. You will find a tarpaulin sheet to cover you while I go and turn the Japs away. Then I will send you over the river to a man I know in the Palace. You will be safer there."

We crouched under the tarpaulin while Nicole kept watch at a window. From it she could see the front gate of the Navy Yard.

"Sanoh is waiting near the gate." Nicole screened her eyes with her hand to prevent the sun blinding her. "The Japs have come now. It is Tanaka. He is talking to Sanoh. I cannot hear what they are saying . . ." For a full minute in silence she continued to watch the scene on which our lives depended. "The Japs are going away . . . Yes, they are going away. The gate is being shut and locked. He has got rid of them."

It was as if the sword on our neck had unexpectedly been lifted. Nevertheless we were still trapped.

It must have been nearly an hour before Sanoh returned. He threw some clothes into a box and said, "Can you change into these very quickly? They are coolie sampan clothes. I am sending you over the river to my friend. His name is Luang Atabrit. He is Librarian in the Grand Palace. He hates the Japs. You see, they killed his brother . . . He will take care of you. The sooner you are on your way the better. I will come back in five minutes. We have a sampan riding at the landing stage. It is loaded with melons . . ."

No clown in pantomime can ever have changed clothes as quickly as we did. John D. and myself found that we were to wear the—rather soiled—white cotton singlet and black "Chinese" trousers often worn by sampan men. Nicole slipped into a red blouse, a panung, and a wide straw circular coolie's hat. She wore no shoes. John D. and I both wore rubber shoes. His had originally been brown. Mine were white. Sanoh had left a tin of liquid shellac which they made in a Dhonburi factory. We made our faces and arms a yellow brown. The stain was remarkably convincing.

Sanoh returned, and for the first time smiled.

"Good." He turned to Nicole. "You are still the least detectable. Can you paddle the sampan?"

"If I go slowly, I can get her across."

"Fine. Then make for the south end of the Royal landing stage—a man will meet you there."

We crept carefully into the sampan. It was indeed loaded with the great green smooth "tangmo" melons. They were piled high in the centre of the sampan. There they served a very useful purpose, partially hiding John D. and myself.

Nicole walked out very gingerly on to the gunwale of the sampan and started to twist and turn her long oar in the way she had seen the sampan coolies do it. The effect was to provide at the same time a propeller and a rudder for the boat.

We edged out into the current, the water very gently lapping our bow. Nicole set our course at least three hundred yards above the Royal landing stage that we could see straight over the river, its green-and-gold roof glinting gaily in the setting sun.

John D. said, "Aren't you steering too far north?"

"No, the current is strong in midstream. If I am able to keep this course we shall end up just about at the landing stage."

We said no other word but watched the little figure under that vast straw hat leaning her full weight on her oar in her attempt to drive the heavy sampan through the current.

The current got stronger and stronger, and Nicole raised the stroke of her oar, hoping to break even and at least hold our own against the river.

She cried out, "The current is too strong . . ."

But at that moment it started to recede. We were reaching the slacker water on the far bank. But we had been driven down below the landing stage. A man standing there waved to us. Nicole took the sampan in within feet of the bank and gently we edged our way back to where the man stood.

The river had all but defeated us. Had Nicole been a little less resolute, we might so easily have succumbed to the current and been carried down head on into the Japanese destroyers anchored in midstream opposite Ta Prachan.

I reflected that, on the whole, during the last four years the Menam Chow Phya had always been a friend to us. This great silent mother of waters had seemed to be on our side, had seemed to hold the secret heart of the Siamese people who wanted only to be free. It was fanciful, perhaps, but that was how I felt.

In another three minutes we reached the south side of the landing stage. The man waiting, who appeared to be a Palace servant—he was dressed in blue panung and white coat, but wore no shoes—tied up the boat and said to us, "Please follow me. The Khun Luang is waiting for you."

We followed the man in single file out of the compound of the Royal landing stage, across the road, and entered the Grand Palace by a small red door, inconspicuous and locked, by the roadside.

This door was in strange contrast to the great gates of the Palace in Bangkok which were always guarded and always open

by day. In Siam, I thought, there is always a back door and a back verandah. In Siam things are not always what they seem.

Luang Atabrit allowed himself to smile as he held out his hand in welcome.

"You must be very tired. Exhausted. I have a room where you may all sleep. It must be one room, I am afraid. It is too dangerous for you to be separated. You are all armed?"

John D. nodded.

"Good; then come with me." He led us to a room on the first floor of the Palace, overlooking the river.

There were mattresses in the room, and chairs. The other furniture was Siamese, low tables in red and gold, mats for the floor, and a large copper spittoon.

On a table was laid out a steaming bowl of rice, some curried chicken, and a bowl of water.

Nicole said, "My friends do not know what words to use to thank you . . ."

Luang Atabrit thought a moment, then said, "When no words come, that is the time for silence." He smiled. "When you have eaten, please sleep. Should they—" he meant the Japanese—"come after you, I will see you are warned in time. Rest, my friends."

We sat down and devoured our rice and curry. Devoured is the only word that describes it.

Then we lay out on the mattresses and rested our aching limbs. It was an unbelievable relief to have at least a respite from that deadly pursuit.

I do not know how long we slept, but it must have been more than twelve hours without waking. I woke first. Nicole was sleeping by John D.'s side. She had her hand in his. It was the only sign she had given that her love for John D. had never ceased. My waking must have woken them, for soon Nicole opened her eyes and, taking her hand from where it lay, awoke John D. too.

Then we heard the commotion. It came, we thought, from the front of the Palace that faces the Ministry of Defence. A shout went up, and we heard jeeps tearing across the Premane ground.

John D. said, "This is it. Tanaka has found us. Be prepared to fight our way out. Listen to see if they get in here." We all listened. The shouting died down, but now there was the sound of heavy footsteps in the corridors.

John D. nodded. "They've got in. Luang Atabrit had no time to warn us."

Footsteps came down the passage. There was a knock at the door. Nicole and John D. sprang to one corner of the room, I to the other, our revolvers covering the doorway. Very slowly the door opened. Then a cockney voice said, "Streuth, you have got yourselves up like proper Charlies." We looked at him, and could not speak. It was a British corporal.

John D. swore, then said, "I never thought I'd be so glad to see the British Army."

FROM the moment General Slim's men poured into Siam from Burma, having inflicted the greatest land defeat of the Eastern war on the Japanese, the world changed for John D. and myself—and for General Shiro Tanaka, now in prison.

We dined together that first night at the Golden Palm again, the three of us listening to the radio as we ate and drank. John D. had changed into uniform and I into a white drill civilian suit. Nicole had managed to retrieve a " prasin " of green and silver, and a charming lace Lampoon blouse. She looked feminine again.

Churchill's voice came over the radio. The announcer said, " The Prime Minister will now speak to you from London." A moment's pause, then the deep emotional voice with that strange lisp that is almost, but never quite, a stammer. " All will be liberated. The years of darkness are over. It is total Victory."

John D., determined not to be too impressed, said, " The old guy can certainly put an act over." Nicole smiled and said nothing. Ah Loke, the senatorial butler was directing his boys with his impassive dignity hardly disturbed by the astonishing events of the last few hours. Mr. Borge, now terribly Dutch again, insisted on opening a bottle of champagne and drinking our health. The dancing girls came over one by one and " weid " to Nicole who had to them become a legend in her own lifetime.

We danced until midnight and then, dog-tired, made for my house that had been Japanese occupied during the war. By good luck the occupiers had been arrested earlier in the day.

The next morning we came down to breakfast to find that meal already prepared for us. My servants had come back at dawn and set to work. This was one of many delightful surprises. At the beginning of the war the Minister of Justice had written to me that, as an " enemy alien," I was dismissed the service. Now, on the breakfast table, was an official letter with the Red Garuda saying that my pay for the war years had accumulated and was awaiting me at the Ministry.

Kian came in to wait on us, his round face older, but now wreathed in smiles. " All very happy, nai. All of us wish to tell you." Then I remembered the Buddha he had given me four long years ago and I thanked him for it. Perhaps the little golden image had really protected me. Kian was certain it had done just that . . .

It was in March 1946, that John D. said to me one day, " Gerald, I'm due to sail for New York next week. I'll miss you."

I wanted to ask him about Nicole. Was it over? Had they finished with each other? But I could not put my questions into words. It was very much their affair.

It was from Nicole that I heard the truth of the matter. She came to see me and said, " Nai, you know the whole story. What am I to do? I love him dearly, and I think if I say the word he will take me with him and marry me . . . But I am a Siamese and he is an American. I fear I may be a hindrance to him in his own

country ; that—" her voice faltered—" he might be ashamed of me. What do you think? "

" I think, if he truly loves you he will marry you, and you must accept."

" But, nai, there is another matter. The visa. It has been twice refused. In Washington they are set against ' former enemy alien subjects ' being allowed into the States, and the Government *does not want American officers to marry them.*"

" Well, that is a real difficulty. I think you have to accept his decision, whatever it may be."

Nicole started to cry quietly, and this I found unbearably distressing. I tried, in vain, to comfort her.

I returned home, troubled and distressed.

The day came for the departure. I motored down with Nicole to see John D. off. He was already aboard, comfortably ensconced in a large cabin. Nicole was showing the fortitude she always had when adversity struck at her. We knocked at the cabin door. John D. sprang up and took her in his arms. In his hand he held a piece of paper.

" The visa," he said. " It came this morning. We go together. We'll be married by the Master."

Nicole could not believe him, but all she said was, " But my clothes, my shoes, everything! "

" I am not marrying your wardrobe, Nicole! "

I left them there as the ships steamed slowly down the tortuous Menam. The old river was playing her last scene in the story of Nicole.

I motored back to my house and it seemed for the first time, lonely, almost forlorn. And back into my vision came the vivid, lively face of Nicole as she had run up the steps of the Golden Palm to sign the book, just before ten p.m. five years ago.

Do you blame Nicole for the way she behaved? Or do you think her courage saved all? I feel that the verdict on Nicole must be one of not guilty. But then I have always been prejudiced in her favour. You see I had never ceased to love her.

I am glad that now I have been able to tell her story.

© Gerald Sparrow 1963

The story of Nicole is taken from Gerald Sparrow's forthcoming book, "The Golden Orchid" to be published by Hutchinson.

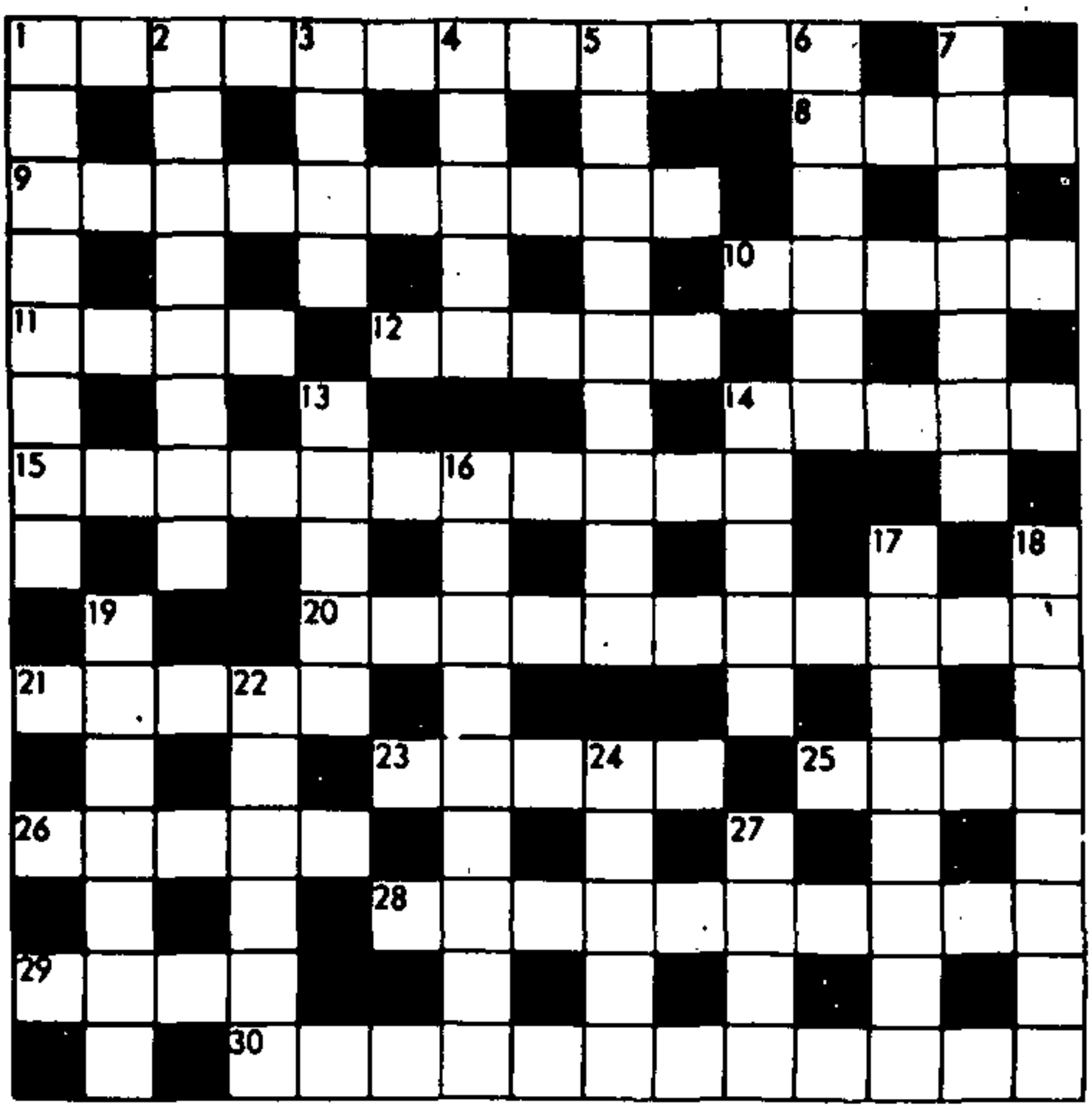
SOLUTION TO ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 136

Across. 1, *Slender means.* 8, *Cape.* 9, *Follow suit.* 10, *Hands.* 11, *Wise.* 12, *Snail.* 14, *Ultra.* 15, *Opening bars.* 20, *Golden apple.* 21, *Pulse.* 23, *Witch.* 25, *Once.* 26, *Envoy.* 28, *Paper-knife.* 29, *Unit.* 30, *Sitting tight.*

Down. 1, *Softwood.* 2, *Enlisted.* 3, *Dhow.* 4, *Resin.* 5, *Eliminate.* 6, *Scrawl.* 7, *Spiders.* 13, *Tinge.* 14, *Usual.* 16, *Gallivant.* 17, *Spanking.* 18, *Reverent.* 19, *Running.* 22, *Shorts.* 24, *Clean.* 27, *Skit.*

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution on page 135



ACROSS

1 Scanty resources—due to slimming? (7, 5).

8 Garment is not wholly cap-à-pie (4).

9 Pursue—with diamonds, perhaps! (6, 4).

10 Mr. Andersen holds a penny (5).

11 "So——so young, they say, do never live long" (*Richard III*) (4).

12 Slain? This pace isn't killing! (5).

14 This marine looks rather blue (5).

15 Symphonic start about 5 p.m. (7, 4).

20 Fruit that launched a thousand ships (6, 5).

21 Even squares dig this beat! (5).

23 Her craft is sorcery (5).

25 Formerly one hundred in one (4).

26 Diplomat caught up in sudden voyage (5).

28 Just the tool for press cuttings (5-5).

29 One crazy French night (4).

30 Holding on—to a bar stool, it seems (7, 5).

DOWN

1 Timber for an easy-chair? (8).

2 Engaged to break stile in the end (8).

3 Who'd go crazy over this boat? (4).

4 Pine to sin again? (5).

5 Cut down Mina in the top drawer (9).

6 Scribble on all fours? (6).

7 Corner boys of the insect world (7).

13 Hue—basically metallic (5).

14 We start common (5).

16 Gallant four in gad about (9).

17 Monarch measures his length over your knee! (8).

18 Devoted but ever raising the rent (8).

19, 22 Athletic briefs (7, 6).

24 Unsullied heart of Uncle Andrew (5).

27 Satire on shilling outfit (4).

Printed in England by PERCY BROTHERS LTD., THE HOTSPUR PRESS, MANCHESTER, 1, and published on the tenth of each month by FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS LTD., FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland, £1 19s. for 12 months, 19s. 6d. for 6 months. Overseas, £1 19s. for 12 months, 19s. 6d. for 6 months. Sole Agents: Australasia, Messrs. GORDON & GOTCH LTD.; South Africa, CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY LTD.; Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Messrs. KINGSTONS LTD.
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